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The hero *versus* his enemies, a pragmatic and linguistic analysis: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Bēowulf*

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Table of Contents

I. Foreword

When I first started thinking about the argument of my thesis I decided in the first place that I would have preferred investigating the Middle English text *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, focusing on a particular aspect of it, which was not figured out yet. Then, at a second reading of the anonymous poem I found the figure of the hero rather interesting in connection to his necessary negative counterpart constituted by the enemy, his enemy. Suddenly, a possible intertextual linking with the Old English *Bēowulf* come up with. This poem too has a peculiar figure of a hero – Bēowulf himself whom the poem is named after – plus not one but three different enemies who the hero has to fight against. Since a plain literary analysis of this hero-enemy relationship matter seemed to me too otiose, I opted for keeping my study on the linguistic side then, in order to further investigate the dynamics of such relationships.

In chapter II, a general overview on both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Bēowulf* is given, with an in-depth analysis in regard to the figures of the hero and his antagonist featured in the former poem.

In chapter III, dedicated to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the focus of the research will be on the *flyting* event performed in the text between Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. A brief account of the particular linguistic field to which this inquiry about a *flyting* performance belongs is also provided, then an in-depth analysis of the places in the text involved in the discussion will follow.

An articulated investigation of the epithets and periphrases used of the three adversaries of the hero – namely Grendel, his mother and the dragon – is the object of chapter IV. Some recapitulatory tables of the occurrences throughout the poem will be featured too.

Then, chapter V will be dedicated to an essential comparison between the two heroes and their behaviours towards the Green Knight and the three monsters, respectively.

Finally, in chapter VI some conclusions on the basis of the previous linguistic analyses will be drawn and consequently the achieved results will be aptly highlighted.

II. A link between two texts

1. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is probably one of the best known Arthurian stories, as well as one of the most important romances written in Middle English. It is said to have been written in the late 14th century, by an anonymous author (or authors), in alliterative verses divided in bob and wheel stanzas. Nevertheless, it is rather difficult to date the poem precisely, as the end of the 14th century is a date attributed thanks to the evidence of the manuscript in which the text is preserved – thus not giving any hints to the epoch when the author composed the original text – plus, there is no way of telling at what interval it may have been copied or how many copies of it existed. Tolkien and Gordon (1967) complain a dearth of internal evidences, in fact:

> The elaboration of the castle architecture, especially in the profusion of pinnacles, is typical of the late fourteenth century; the richness of costume and furnishings, and the style of armour, are appropriate to the same period though they would not in themselves exclude a rather earlier one – there is ample testimony to the cultivation of luxury in dress and household by the middle of the century. [...] Perhaps the repeated emphasis on complex design and lavish display is enough to imply a date towards the end of the century. (Tolkien and Gordon 1967: xxv)

Moreover, the language stage – as a possible way of dating the text could be through the analysis of the loss of the historical inflexional *-e* in disyllables but not much is known about its chronology – and also the vocabulary itself, with its considerable amount of French words, are not very useful in dating the poem.

As for the area of composition, it is little less uncertain. On the basis that in lines 691-702 the author shows a good knowledge of the geography of North Wales and Wirral, Tolkien and Gordon (1967) suppose that *Sir Gawain* could have been reasonably written not far from this region.

Also, the language helps in pointing out a possible place of composition, since it contains many northerly features. First of all, several words usually found in northern and north-midland texts occur in the poem, and within this group a number which appear only in northern and Scottish writers – such as *brent*, 'steep' (l. 2165), *farand*, 'splendid' (l.101), *snayp* (*snayped*, 'nipped cruelly' l. 2003), *snart*, 'bitterly' (l. 2003), *stange*, 'pole' (l.

1614). Also, some inflexions are northerly, as, for instance, the regular *-es, -ez* in 2 and 3 person singular of verbs and occasionally in plurals or the present participle ending *-ande* (l. 1207), naming only a couple of them. On the other hand, other inflexions are clearly midland, like, in particular, the pronoun *ho* 'she', whose initial sound is confirmed by alliteration in ll. 948 and 2463, or, again, the rounded vowel in *brode* (l. 967) and the development of OE. *hw* to *w*, shown again by alliteration, are midland rather than northern. Finally, it could be stated that

> the author obviously used to some extent a traditional poetic vocabulary, and also combined with English and Scandinavian words of restricted currency many French words which cannot have been limited to a comparatively remote area. [...] His language is to some extent eclectic; yet the basis of it is no doubt, as most scholars have long believed, a dialect of the north-west midlands. (Tolkien and Gordon 1967: xxvii)

The *Sir Gawain* poem is the last of four in MS. Cotton Nero A.x. stored in the British Museum, a vellum manuscript whose measures are c. 170 × 125 mm – it was named after Sir Robert Cotton, who acquired this manuscript, whose previous cataloguing was in the library of Henry Savile of Bank in Yorkshire (1568-1617). It was formerly bound together with two unrelated manuscripts, then it was rebound separately in November 1964, now bearing the distinguishing mark *Art. 3* on spine. The manuscript "begins with a bifolium, continues with seven gatherings of twelve leaves, each with a catchword at the end. And ends with a gathering of four leaves." (Tolkien and Gordon 1967: xi). The poems of our concern is on ff. 91[a] to 124[b], if we exclude the illustrations, following *Pearl*, *Purity* (or *Cleanness*), and *Patience*, all written in the same small sharp hand. The titles by which these poems are commonly known were given by their first editors, for the texts in the manuscript bear no one. Large capital letters, coloured blue and red, at the beginning of each mark the separation between the poems. The internal divisions in each poems are signalled by smaller coloured capitals, which in *Sir Gawain* vary both in size and elaboration. Along with the texts are rough illustrations, now somewhat indistinct, and, in particular, four of them are to *Gawain*. The first one precedes the poem itself and shows, combined in only one picture, Gawain taking the axe from King Arthur, who is standing at the high table, and also the beheading scene with the Green Knight on horseback holding up his severed head. The other three illustrations are at the end of the poem: the first shows one of the threefold Lady Bertilak's attempts at seducing Sir Gawain; the second of these depicts Gawain on horseback at the Green Chapel with the

Green Knight, holding his axe; the last one represents Gawain at Camelot, kneeling before Arthur, Guinevere and a courtier. As Tolkien and Gordon (1967: xiii) note, a curious feature of these illustrations is that the author fails to illustrate some peculiar characteristics of the text, as he does not depict the Green Knight correctly, since his face and hair are not green, and his beard and hair are no longer than Arthur's.

As far as the plot of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is concerned, it is constituted by two "adventures" which are firstly presented as separated, while, in the end, they are finally revealed as strongly linked in some of their peculiar elements. The first adventure – which occupies the first and fourth sections of the poem – regarding the Green Knight's challenge and the ensuing beheading match is presented to King Arthur and his court right before the Christmas' feasting and sees Sir Gawain involved in the contest as the King's champion; the second – in the second and third sections – concerning the threefold temptation of Gawain by Lady Bertilak, at the castle of her husband, where the hero is hosted. The outcome of the contest with the Green Knight is suddenly clear to the audience as depending on Gawain's conduct during his stay at the castle, in fact the temptation itself is strictly connected to the final round of the beheading match that takes place at the Green Chapel. Since, at Bertilak's castle, Gawain was asked by Bertilak himself to exchange the winnings of the day every evening and the third day he fails since he does not offer to his host the green girdle the lady gave to him, so, during the return match, the three blows that Gawain has to suffer are the counterpart of these three mornings of temptation and the "nirt in þe nek" (l. 2498) is the token of the failure to fulfil completely the contract of exchange. Finally, such parallelisms are understood better when the Green Knight is revealed to be Bertilak de Hautdesert himself, kept under a spell by Morgan le Fay, who wanted to test her brother's court's virtue. In the end, beyond this intricate system of internal references, courage and especially truth to the pledged word are proved to be the peculiar characteristics of a knight who is said to be the most courteous of all. But Gawain's perfection is indeed a great deal, since such a character is usually known for his courtesy, but also for lechery and treachery, so maybe the *Gawain*-poet purposely ignoring these vices – at least at the beginning of the poem – could have confused the audience.

At his point, a portrait of the character of Gawain throughout several literatures and centuries might prove useful.

1.I. Gawain

According to the tradition, Gawain is the eldest son of King Lot of Orkney, King's Arthur nephew and, together with Lancelot, the most important knight of the Round Table. In medieval literature, he also appears as Gauvain, Gawein, Walwanus, Walewein and Gwalchmai. Basically, "he is the hero of more English romances than any other knight, including even Arthur" (Benson 1965: 95). Gawain is not only hero of several English poems but he is also featured in one of the finest medieval Arthurian romances, *Walewein*, written by the Flemish poets Pennic and Pieter Vostaert in the mid-13th century. In this poem Walewein is seen as a hero without parallel for courtesy and valour and such a positive judgement is reflected in the epithet he is given in some Middle Dutch Arthurian romances, "father of adventures".

In Welsh literature Gawain has a predecessor in the figure of Gwalchmai, who appears in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, where he is one of Culhwch's helpers in his effort to win Olwen. Gwalchmai is also said to be nephew to Arthur and that he never returns home without having fulfilled a quest. Moreover, in other Welsh romances, in reference to his skill with words, he has the nickname "dafod aur" (the golden-tongued), a feature which leads to the traditional rendering of Gawain as the knight who is the best at handling a particularly courtly language.

Arthur's nephew is also featured in one of the most influential book of the Middle Ages, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britianniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*), completed around the year 1136, with the name of Gualguanus performing one of the king's chief counsellors. He is reported of having been killed in Arthur's war against Mordred.

As for Old French literature, the character of Gauvain is here progressively devalued. The first step is his appearance in Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enid* (c. 1165), where he is portrayed as positively as in Geoffrey's *Historia*, being Arthur's wise counsellor and the embodiment of a large number of virtues. In the *Chevalier de la Charrette* too, he is represented as an admirable knight even if he is surpassed by Lancelot. A further comparison between Gauvain and another knight is provided in Chrétien's last work,

Perceval (c. 1190). Initially, Arthur's nephew is favoured but, at some point in the story, the two knights are equal, for Perceval has become a powerful knight from the yokel he was. In the last part of the poem Gauvain's downfall begins, while Perceval, on the other hand, is proved successful in his search for the Grail. *Perceval* is an unfinished poem which, thanks to the popularity it acquired, was provided by four sequels, each of them offering a different picture of Gauvain: in the first and in the second, Arthur's nephew is depicted as an outstanding knight but with some limitations and, as it happened in Chrétien's *Perceval*, when it comes to the Grail quest he fails; in the third sequel, a new aspect of Gauvain's behaviour emerges, namely his being lecherous; in the fourth of them, he is again portrayed as a fine knight and a paragon of virtues.

In the poem *La Vengeance Raguidel* (c. 1220), the poet Raoul succeeds in writing a real anti-Gauvain romance depicting Arthur's nephew as a ridiculous knight unable to remember to take with him the lance-head he had taken from the dead body of Raguidel when he sets off to avenge the death of him and thus forced to return to Camelot empty-handed. In *La Vengeance* Gauvain fails also as a lover, since when Ydain, the woman he falls in love with, has to choose between Gauvain and an unknown knight, she prefers the latter over the former because, according to the author, she had caught a glimpse of his noble part when she saw the stranger urinating against a hedge.

As for the Old French romances in prose, in the *Suite-Vulgate du Merlin* (c. 1230), Gauvain's youthful deeds are given some favourable account, while the prose cycle *Lancelot en prose – Queste de Saint Graal – Mort le roi Artu* (1215-35) condemns the hero as the representative of worldly values when they are set against the religious values which constituted the background of the new way of intending chivalry. Finally, in the *Tristan en prose* (c. 1230), Gauvain's degradation reaches its acme, for he is portrayed as a rogue who even does kill and rape.

With regard to the Middle English literature, Gawain is the undisputed protagonist of the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, discussed above. In general, Arthur's nephew is indeed a popular figure and he is almost always depicted as the faultless hero, apart from in Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (c. 1470). Another text that has Gawain as its main character is *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* (c. 1450), where the hero has to deal with a wife who can either be beautiful by day and ugly by night, or the other way

round, and Gawain has to choose what he prefers best. Since Gawain is unable to choose, he left such a decision to his wife thus accepting her dominion and so breaking the spell. Also in German romances, the treatment reserved to Gawain/Gawein is usually positive, as in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzifal* (1200-10) where the knight is said to be perfect. Obviously, the figure of Gawain has not stopped to inspire several authors throughout the centuries, who gave either positive or negative portraits of him, but I have preferred to limit my *excursus* to the Middle Ages, since they are the temporal background of my study.

1.II. The Green Knight

The peculiar characteristic that makes the Green Knight a so original knight, and consequently a subtle adversary, is his ambiguity, reflected both in his appearance and in his behaviour throughout the entire poem. When he first enters Camelot, the action is suddenly suspended and the poet, according to the tradition, provides his audience with a description – a very detailed description indeed – of the Green Knight, which occupies over ninety lines. The knight is presented at once both as a challenger and as a host, an ambivalence which is going to remain a key element of the Green Knight/Bertilak de Hautdesert figure. Since the plot requires the adversary to be a mysterious character and, at the same time, the literary tradition requires the challenger – but generally speaking every new characters who enters the scene – to be carefully described, the *Gawain*-poet proves his ability in giving a portrait of the Green Knight completely dominated by his essential ambiguity. Such an ambiguity becomes necessary when one realises that the description of the knight presents not one but two different conventional figures, the frightening creature with a supernatural hue and the handsome and attractive knight.
According to the convention, the description of the Green Knight fits the unified head-to-toe *descriptio* of medieval poetics, beginning in line 136:

> Þer hales in at þe halle dor an aghlich mayster,
> On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe;
> Fro þe swyre to þe swange so sware and so þik,
> And his lyndes and his lymes so longe and grete,

Half etayn in erde I hope þat he were.[1]

(ll. 136-40)

The first impression is undoubtedly that of a monster. The Green Knight is described as a gigantic figure who suddenly enters the hall and exceeds everyone else in height to the point he is even compared to an *etayn*, 'ogre, giant', a noun derived from OE. *eoten* – one of the epithets used of Grendel, as we will see in chapter IV. Then, turning to the next line such monstrous description is abruptly abandoned in order to begin a new one:

Bot mon most I algate mynn hym to bene,
And þat þe myriest in his muckel þat myȝt ride;
For of bak and of brest al were his bodi sturne,
Both his wombe and his wast were worthily smale,
And alle his fetures folȝande, in forme þat he hade,
ful clene.[2]

(ll. 141-6)

It could be plainly noted that the structure of this new passage is parallel to the previous one and, in particular, if lines from 136 to 140 cover the description from neck to leg, through these lines the poet depicts the Green Knight's body from the breast to waist, thus completing the entire portrait of him – apart from his head, which is then described in lines 181 and following. Furthermore, if the previous passage makes the Green Knight a grotesque figure, this one presents him as the "myriest" of men – an adjective that, even if its use is unusual here, as Boroff (1962: 107-14) notes, is certainly used by the poet in order to intend the Green Knight's attractiveness.

Such alternation between the beautiful and the grotesque is not limited to these lines only but appears throughout the rest of the long description. The four lines straight after the "ful clene" interrupt again the description, shifting the focus to everyone's reaction to the passage of the knight. It is in line 150 that the grotesque aspect reappears, for we are informed that this figure is "oural enker-grene" ('green all over glowed', l. 150). Then,

[1] "When there passed through the portals a perilous horseman, / the mightiest on middle-earth in measure of height, / from his gorge to his girdle so great and so square, / and his loins and his limbs so long and so huge, / that half a troll upon earth I trow that he was." (Tolkien 1975: 21)

[2] "But the largest man alive at least I declare him; / and yet the seemliest for his size that could sit on a horse, / for though in back and in breast his body was grim, / both his paunch and his waist were properly slight, / and all his features followed his fashion so gay / in mode." (Tolkien 1975: 21)

the poet goes on with the description of the Green Knight's garments, richly decorated with jewels ("*and oþer blyþe stones, / Þat were richely rayled in his aray clene*"[3]) and with fur and ermine fringes ("*With pelure pured apert, þe pane ful clene / With blyþe blaunner ful bryȝt*"[4]). The narrator also adds a first mention to the Green Knight's horses, which matches in greenness his master ("*a grene hors gret and þikke*"[5]). After that, the portrait is resumed and again the description starts at the top, even if, this time, it begins from the head, so we discover that this figure has a great beard and hair that covers his entire chest like a cape:

> Fayre fannand fax vmbefoldes his schulderes;
> A much berd as a busk ouer his brest henges,
> Þat wyth his hiȝlich here þat of his hed reches
> Watz euesed al vmbertone abof his elbowes,
> Þat half his armes þer-vnder were halched in þe wyse
> Of a kyngez capados þat closes his swyre.[6]
>
> (ll. 181-6)

In this new passage of the description there is no repetition at all, in fact the poet simply adds some elements that fit perfectly with the ones already presented in the first sections of this portrait, so that each time we can upgrade our personal image of the Green Knight with new details and thus our impression of him is constantly changing:

> First we see him as a monster (vv. 136-40), then as a handsome knight (vv. 141-46), then as a completely green man (vv. 147-50), again as an attractive character (vv. 151-67), and finally as a grotesquely bearded churl. [...] What is surprising in the work of such a poet is that the portrait as a whole is significantly blurred, and it is impossible to visualize a coherent figure of the challenger. (Benson 1965: 61)

Finally, in this last part of the description, as in the first one, we are presented an ugly old churl, terrifying in his appearance and thus capable, with his own presence only, to leave everyone speechless. On the other hand, in the second and fourth sequences it is a handsome young man the one who is described by the poet. But these two descriptions

[3] "And bright stones besides / that were richly arranged in his array so fair." (Tolkien 1975: 21)
[4] "With fur finely trimmed, shewing fair fringes / of handsome ermine gay." (Tolkien 1975: 21)
[5] "A green horse great and thick." (Tolkien 1975: 22)
[6] "Fair flapping locks enfolding his shoulders, / a big beard like a bush over his breast hanging / that with the handsome hair from his head falling / was sharp shorn to an edge just short of his elbows, / so that half his arms under it were hid, as it were / in a king's capadoce that encloses his neck." (Tolkien 1975: 22)

are never blended, they remain independent one another, thus providing the ambiguity and the contradiction that are the chief characteristics of the Green Knight.

> Seen from one angle, he is an attractive character who, it seems, could have been patterned on one of the contemporary noblemen with whom he has been identified; from another angle, he is a frightening figure who does indeed resemble some of the supernatural "originals" that have been adduced to explain him. He is composed of contradictions. (Benson 1965: 62)

Such contradictions are also spotted in his actions, since throughout the poem he represents both Gawain's dangerous adversary and his merry host, and he begins with being the hero's strict enemy and ends as his fond friend.

2. Bēowulf

Like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Bēowulf* is the conventional title of the best known Old English poem that follows the deeds of the Geat hero – then king – called Bēowulf. Furthermore, like *sir Gawain* again, and nearly all the Old English poems, we do not know anything about the author[7] (or the authors, since there are scholars who do not support the idea of an unity of authorship on the basis of the heterogeneity of its contents) and there have been also some hesitations in providing a date of composition. Obviously, the latest possible date is indicated by the time when the manuscript was written down; the ms. is the Cotton Vitellius A.xv. preserved in the British Library, which dates from about 1000 A.D. Other useful information to date the poem are, first of all, the fact that such a text "so thoroughly Scandinavian in subject-matter and evincing the most sympathetic interest in Danish affairs cannot well have been composed after the beginning of the Danish invasions toward the end of the 8th century." (Klaeber 1950: cvii). Then, as for some historical data present in the poem, we may name the repeated allusions to the raid of Hygelāc, which took place about 521 A.D., and also the mention of the Merovingian line of kings (*Merewīoing*, l. 2921). Another event usually classed as "historical" is the death of Onela, generally assigned to the year 535. Finally, the pervading Christian atmosphere points to a period not earlier than the second half of the 7th century.

[7] An interesting definition of the poet is the one given by Whitelock, "the Christian author who was responsible for giving the poem the general shape and tone in which it has survived" (1951: 3).

As far as the above-mentioned manuscript is concerned, it consists of two originally separate codices, which were joined by the binder in the 17th century. *Bēowulf* occupies the folios 129[a]-198[b] or, according to the foliation of 1884, 132[a]-201[b], being the fourth texts in the second codex, hence preceded by three prose pieces and followed by the poem *Judith*. We owe the Cottonian collection, to which this manuscript belongs, to Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1571-1631) though we do not know where he obtained such codex. The name 'Laurence Nouell', along with the date 1536, written at the top of its first page leads the scholars to believe that Nowell, dean of Lichfield and interested in the study on Anglo-Saxon, was involved in the preservation of the manuscript in the years following the dissolution of monasteries and consequently the destruction of several literary treasures. The *Bēowulf* codex was then dated about the end of the tenth century thanks to the analysis of the handwriting exhibited by its two scribes.

The *Bēowulf* poem, consisting of 3182 alliterative longs verses, is truly infused with the language of poetry in its vocabulary.

> A large proportion of its words is virtually limited to poetic diction, many of them being no doubt archaisms, while the abundance of compounds used testifies to the creative possibilities of the alliterative style. A good many terms are nowhere recorded outside of *Bēowulf*, and not a few of these may be confidently set down as of the poet's own coinage. Indeed, by reason of its wealth, variety, and picturesqueness of expression the language of the poem is of more than ordinary interest. A host of synonyms enliven the narrative, notably in the vocabulary pertaining to kings and retainers, war and weapons, see and seafaring. Generously and withal judiciously the author employs those picturesque circumlocutory words and phrases known as 'kennings', which, emphasizing a certain quality of a person or thing, are used in place of the plain, abstract designation. (Klaeber 1950: lxiii)

Such kenningar very often take the form of compounds, for composition is one of the most striking elements of its diction. Compounds constitutes also the major part of the terms employed in the poem, being one third of its entire vocabulary, which means that some 1070 compounds are observed throughout the text.

The transmitted text of *Bēowulf* shows a variety of language forms in it. On the whole, we observe West Saxon forms of language, with the Late West Saxon ones predominating, plus an admixture of non-West Saxon elements, notably Anglian[8].

[8] A very detailed list of such several linguistic features shown in the text is presented in Klaeber (1950: lxxi-xcv).

As for the structure and the plot of the poem, it consists of two distinct parts held together only by the person of the hero, who happens to be the main character of the Old English text named after him. The two parts are in a way fairly independent, since the first does not require or presuppose a continuation and the second does not depend for its interpretation on the events narrated in the first plot.

The action does not start until line 86, being preceded by an introduction that recounts the story of Scyld, the mythical founder of the Scylding dynasty, and his line of descendants down to king Hrōðgār, who built the great hall Heorot, where most of the following events will take place. Then the figure of Grendel is introduced. In fact we are told about his first onslaught, at night, in Heorot and the consequent killings of thirty men. For twelve years, Hrōðgār and his people are doomed to suffer Grendel's ravages until Bēowulf, nephew to the king of the Geats, having heard of the doings of Grendel, resolved to come to the assistance of Hrōðgār. At Heorot, Bēowulf offers his help to the king and promises him to cleanse his hall once and for all, so a gracious reply from Hrōðgār follows. Then, during the banquet, the dispute with Unferð – a dispute about Bēowulf's youthful swimming contest with Breca – suddenly takes place. At nightfall Bēowulf waits for Grendel to arrive and attack Heorot again and so begins the fight between them. The monster, severely injured, escapes to his abode, leaving his torn off arm behind. During the feast prepared for celebrating Grendel's defeat, the scop relates the Finnsburg tale, one of the numerous digressions in the poem. That night then, Grendel's mother, longing to avenge her son, attacks Heorot herself killing Æschere, a favourite thane of Hrōðgār. With a troop of Danes and Geats the king and the hero reach the mere where Grendel and his mother's abode is located. Bēowulf plunges into the water and engages battle with Grendel's mother in her cavern, at the bottom of the lake. After a hard fight, the hero manages to prevail over the monstrous woman and thus comes back to Heorot with Grendel's head as a trophy. For the hero and his warriors is now time to embark and return to the land of the Geats, where Bēowulf recounts his deeds to his king, Hygelāc.

After the death of Hygelāc and of his son, Bēowulf ruled over Geats for over fifty years and he has now to face a new thread, a fight with the dragon which has been robbed of its precious cup. The king decides to meet the enemy single-handed and, during the battle, he finds himself nearly overwhelmed by the dragon's might and flames. Wīglāf, joins his king in the action and deals the dragon the decisive blow while Bēowulf cuts it in two.

Then the king, mortally wounded, gives thanks for having won the dragon's hoard for his people, orders a mound to be built for him and suddenly passes away. The poem ends with the funeral of the hero, who is placed over his pyre, amid the lamentations of his people and the praises of twelve noble warriors.

A detailed description of the figure of Bēowulf should be somehow redundant since everything we know about him is what we are told in the poem, while, as for his three adversaries, chapter III is entirely dedicated to giving a portrait of them as much complete as possible.

III. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: a poem on the verge between two *gomenes* ("games")

1. Delimitation of the research field

When, as a scholar, one finds themselves dealing with a text like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (from this point onwards I will refer to it as *Sir Gawain*), at first reading there is so much to focus on that deciding which pathway is best to follow can become a difficult task to accomplish.

According to one's personal inclinations, the text is thus open to several interpretations, each taking under consideration a significant number of aspects, all of them equally peculiar to the text itself. On the one hand, I could have taken under consideration an analysis of the multifarious pattern of symbols connected, for instance, to the religious field – a pattern which the text is completely infused with – or, on the other, I could have decided to undertake an inquiry between the sources of the manifold episodes which constitutes the very structure of *Sir Gawain*.

Among this intricate system of possible fields of research I have decided to pick up the one related to the studies of pragmatics, in which we can distinguish between two different subject areas: one deals with information structure, implicit meaning and cognitive aspects of utterance interpretation – all of them are typical components of the Anglo-American approach to the discipline; the other, linked to a wider conception that includes the social context of language use – a conception distinctive of the continental European perspective on pragmatic studies. This latter area is in turn founded on a sociologically-based approach which makes the patterns of human interaction easier to understand and helps to investigate the developments of these patterns.

In order to present a sort of reconciliation between these two views and then define historical pragmatics as well, Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice (2007: 13) give the following definition: "Historical pragmatics focuses on language use in past contexts and examines how meaning is made. It is an empirical branch of linguistic study, with focus on authentic

language use of the past". Jucker (2008: 895) defines historical pragmatics as follows: "[...] historical pragmatics can be defined as a field of study that wants to understand the patterns of intentional human interaction (as determined by the conditions of society) of earlier periods, the historical developments of these patterns, and the general principles underlying such developments". This definition relates to the three areas which historical pragmatics is concerned of, such as: "the language use in earlier periods, the development of language use and the principles of such developments" (Taavitsainen and Jucker, 2010: 6). Finally, it is important to highlight that such definitions do not imply consequently strict boundaries as far as any contribution to the studies is concerned.

Since my work has been based on written texts – *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which constitutes the subject of the present chapter, and *Bēowulf*, to which the next chapter is devoted – and since I am going to analyse a specific pattern of human interaction between knights in medieval times together with an inquiry on the periphrasis and epithets used of Bēowulf's monstrous antagonists on the background of other Old English texts where some of these epithets are employed but with different referents, my field of research is thus limited to the above-mentioned historical pragmatics.

2. Ritual

In order to moving further to the core of my analysis another field needs to be defined: ritual.

By looking at the Oxford English Dictionary we are presented with the following definition:

ritual /ˈrɪtʃʊəl/

- **noun**

  1.

  [...]

  b. The prescribed form or order of religious or ceremonial rites.

  2.

> **a.** A ritual act or ceremonial observance. Also in later use: an action or a series of actions regularly or habitually repeated.
>
> [...]
>
> **c.** The performance of ritual acts. Also in later use: repeated actions or patterns of behaviour having significance within a particular social group (OED, s.v. "ritual").

In our context the last definition is the more relevant since it is unrelated to a religious background. In fact, it is common thinking relate the term *ritual* to any particular religious rite but we have to bear in mind that, as the definition itself states, every action regularly performed by someone is liable to be described as ritual. Why a ritual represents a so peculiar part in human life still remains a challenging question to be answered. Without any doubt ritual performances have always had, and are likely to continue to have, a tremendous appeal and impact over people worldwide. Even avoiding references to the animal world, where rituals play a relevant role and very often scholars look at them as models for further investigating human behaviours, one of the reasons of such an appeal could be observed in the fact that engaging in ritual performances is always a synonymous of being part of a group or, even better, of being accepted as a member of a society, which is regulated by its own rules and consequently its rituals. An aspect that is strongly related to this last statement is the psychological involvement of the self engaged in the ritual with the resulting "feeling of awe" diagnosed by Muir, by asserting that "[i]n that emotional evocation lies the work of the ritual. [...] To share in a ritual performance means to live 'a life of emotion, not of thoughts'" (1997: 2). In addition Kertzer claims that "[t]he power of ritual […] stems not just from its social matrix, but also from its psychological underpinnings. [...] Participation in ritual involves physiological stimuli, the arousal of emotions; ritual works through the sense to structure our sense of reality and our understanding of the world around us" (1988: 10). On the bases of these two statements, it could be noted that such an awe and consequently such stimuli and emotions, linked to the psychological constituent of the human being, should be better related to a specific type of ritual, the religious ones, for being sunk into the atmosphere of these religious performances drives the person to feel themselves closer to the divinity (or the divinities

if we are concerned with some kind of heathenism). In fact, ritual has been described as "a way of regulating relations between society and the supernatural" (Burke 1987: 75). Even if this kind of religious ritual could open a wide margin for further investigations it will be no longer taken under consideration in the present research.

Speaking more generally, each type of ritual performance shares with the others two notable features: the first is that ritual action "involves modes of behaviour that are formally fixed" (Bax 2010: 484), while the other is that, from a pragmatic point of view, "ritual speech acts are governed by sufficiently strict formulation and/or sequencing rules (Bax 2004: 194). On the contrary, despite this already stated formal fixity of pattern, the meaning of ritual itself is "as often as not unfixed, as ritual (speech) acts usually mean more, if not something completely different, than appears on first sight" (Bax 2010: 485). Such degree of formality, standardisation, ritualisation indeed is likely to be observed in a style of verbal disputation called *flyting*, which is going to constitute the main purpose of analysis of a particular event occurring in *Sir Gawain*. The first note that needs to be pinned down is the difference between what Ward Parks calls "heroic flyting" (Parks 1990: 6), which is related to a military background, and the so-called "ludic flyting", a medieval and sixteenth century literary practice associated with some poets such as Dunbar, Skelton or Montgomery, originated from a sophisticated mix of oral and written traditions.

As for the word *flyting*, it never occurs as such in any Old English text but there are nevertheless numerous attestations to the verb *flitan*, which means "to strive, contend, dispute, rebel" (Bosworth and Toller 1898, s.v. *flitan*) while, later in Middle English, the verb begins to indicate "noisy quarrels and arguments, often taking place in public" (Bawcutt 1983:7). At this point, it would be interesting to contextualise *flyting* in the Norse scenario too. Through the corpus of the Norse material, three different types of *flyting* could be pinpointed, showing slight differences: the first, *senna,* is an uncommon word which is supposed to mean "quarrel"; *manniafnaðr* instead, "refers to a social practice involving the matching of two men's reputations" (Clover 1980:444); *nið*, finally, is a category which refers to sexual defamation. Both *senna* and *manniafnaðr* are thought to have legal origins and then they have been elevated to literary categories by modern scholars. Harking back to the Old English tradition, *flyting* could be sometimes confused with another performative shouting called *gilpcwide*; the term is formed by two

constituents: the first, *gilp,* is a boast, but one carrying a positive social significance; the second constituent is *bēot*, which signifies a vow or a promise regarding the speaker's future action that derives from the identity of the hero himself, making thus the *bēot* a kind of prelude to a role-defining action. So, both *gilpcwide* and *flyting* can be compared since they both contain vows of future action. In particular, in the flyting performative speech, vows are usually aimed at the adversary, whereas "in *gilpcwide*, the action may be directed against an enemy not present, perhaps a non-human opponent." (Arnovick 1999:33). To sum up, the word *flyting* could be better defined in relation to a designation for "verbal contesting with an ad hominem orientation" (Parks 1990:6) in order to distinguish this practice from another dispute whose subject is a nonpersonal one. Parks, then, continues by stating that thanks to such a definition we are thus enabled to study *flyting* as a cross-cultural genre.

While attempting at studying *flyting* as a dialogic event it could be interesting wondering why this practice has been exerting a remarkable appeal on the human psyche and from where it is possible to trace back an explanation. As a starting point we should look to *flyting* not as something strictly related to a dialogic context but as to something which deals with the tendency, shared both by human beings and animals, of putting oneself into a contest. Since this shared tendency constitutes a kind of affiliation between human beings and the rest of animal kingdom, at least from the point of view of behaviour, Parks pinpoints an answer to the question about why it seems that, in their works, many authors are concerned with *flyting* or similar types of formalized contesting by asserting that that answer could lie in "the psychological sources of agonistic behavior" (Parks 1990: 16).

Let us now try to focus on the contest itself and its causes. In such a situation there are usually two persons – or animals – who are engaged in a conflict which is then going to follow its own rules. But what are the possible triggering causes of such a ritualised aggression? It is not an easy task to give an answer, because of the complexity in highlighting the causation linked with the difficulties derived from an attempt to describe such causes by dividing them into different categories, which are not completely clear-cut. Overall, we could name one or two categories: predatory and sex-related. As for the former, it is the category on which the model followed by the aggressions performed by Grendel towards the Danes is based and, more generally, this one is maybe the most common causation to a conflict, since very often both human beings and animals are

pushed to fight each other in order to conquer new territories, or food. The latter, instead, is the category concerned with sex and sexual identity for males are the ones usually engage conflicts, even if there are two remarkable exceptions in the heroic world such as Virgil's Camilla and *Nibelungenlied*'s Brunhild.

As far as the heroic contest is concerned, it has been already stated that there is a paradigm which has to be followed in the narrative as well. First of all, among different literary genres epic is the one which exhibits a peculiar predilection for narrating single encounters in which only two persons are involved, usually the greatest heroes at strategically important moments in the narration. Examples are, of course, the one and only *flyting* event featured in *Bēowulf* – the skirmish between the Geatish hero and Unferþ – and the one occurring in *Sir Gawain*, involving Gawain himself and the Green Knight, as well as King Arthur, at least in a first moment. Apart from the combatants another group of participants takes part at the contest, performing thus a passive role as witnesses, whose presence during the dispute is also indispensable. Their function is merely to observe the conflict from the outside and, by doing so, enable the epic heroes to obtain the *kleos* (which means fame or glory) they are looking for and that can be achieved only through the agency of observers, whoever they are. This opens to further taxonomies for what concerns various types of onlookers, who happened to be displayed in Anglo-Saxon but also Homeric epic, as Parks points out (Parks 1990: 37-41). In fact, sometimes it happens that some divine agents not solely take part to the action as witnesses but they decide also to meddle in the outcome of contests, making the relationship between observing and interfering anything but blurred. Yet, in the end, this type of onlooker is not so much concerned with *kleos* but rather with the assignation of victory: heroes want to impress their equals or near-equals thanks to their deeds while trying to secure their victory through God or the gods. So, we have two different types of witnesses, both human this time: the first one is constituted by "the contestant's heroic peers of both armies", while the other belongs to a different narrative level, being the epic narrator himself the one "who enables his readers or auditors to give further witness to the deeds of great heroes through the medium of his narrative rendering" (Parks 1990:38). As for the setting, finally, Clover pinpoints that in Germanic *flyting* episodes "there are two standard settings, one outdoors over what Phillpotts called 'the sundering flood' (a body of water separating the contenders), the other indoors in the hall – at drinking, often at

court (or, in Iceland, at the Alþing).” (Clover 1980:447). So, in *Sir Gawain*, it is precisely at court, at Camelot, during the celebration for Christmas that the *flyting* exchange happens, following the modes of interaction engaged in a process of guest-host bonding which is usually set in the host’s hall, in the very context of feasting.

3. Discussing flyting events

As one can imagine, *flyting* does not appear alone in heroic epic or in other settings, but it seems to be usually associated with *fighting*. On this premise, we do not have however to assume that every *flyting* must culminate in a martial outcome and that it is therefore the cause for fighting; on the other hand, martial overtones are still spotted in *flyting* speeches and *flyting* exchanges do arise in battle. Following Clover assumptions – she states that “flyting is conceived [...] as a verbal combat complete in itself” (Clover 1980: 459) – even if in a martial context a loser decides to seek revenge for his being defeated in battle and then a fighting episode starts, this new phase should be treated independently.

Parks, on his behalf, highlights a relationship between verbal – proper to *flyting* – and martial (or nonverbal) – proper to fighting – contesting, a relationship that has been called “oral contract” (Parks 1980:43). Such contract is thus formed by two important motives, the *eristic* and the *contractual*: the former manifests itself when each contestant tries to outman his adversary or foe and thereby to win *kleos*, while the latter can occur overtly or covertly projecting the future course of the exchange. Another important feature of this contract is the heroic willingness to honour the commitments on which the contract itself depends. In fact, cheating is a really hazardous move that could result in the failure of the system of reciprocity upon which the relations between the two combatants are built. It is useful to bear in mind such an assumption, for cheating is something that we are going to deal with in the analysis of *Sir Gawain*.

As stated previously, *flyting* events usually follow a ritual pattern which means that between the two adversaries engaged in battle there is an exchange of fixed or nearly fixed verbal interactions that also provide us with the reason for the fight itself. Marcel Bax (1981) in his paper traces some characteristic sequences of such utterances in three different contexts, studying various Middle Dutch texts. Those sequences are concerned,

first of all, with chivalrous knights who are themselves involved in the conflicts and moved by several purposes – such as requests for information, requests for action and accusations – which all constitute the basis for the fixed sequential structures of conversations that open these ritual challenges.

In order to develop a basic model for the contest, Parks defines what he intends with the term *flyting* and how he has delimited the field *flyting* by stating that he limits it "to the prospective speech exchange, that is, the precombat dialogue in which contracts are established" (1990:50). What results from his studies is the following contest pattern:

A. *Engagement*. Two heroes and potential adversaries arrive or are poetically brought to the foreground at some typical contest site.
B. *Flyting*. The heroes engage in an adversarial verbal exchange that has two qualitatively distinguishable yet mutually interpenetrating aspects:
    a. *eris* – the heroes contend for *kleos* or glory; and
    b. *contract* – they implicitly or explicitly agree on a course of action from a range of possibilities, where at least one of which entails a trial of arms or some other form of manly display.
C. *Trial of arms*. The heroes engage in a trial of arms or display specified in the contract (if the flyting did indeed resolve on a combative option); one of them wins.
D. *Ritual resolution*. The heroes terminate their contest through
    a. *retrospective speech*, sometimes accompanied by
    b. *symbolic action*.

(Parks 1990: 50)

At this point it needs to be pointed out that this pattern is not always strictly followed, in fact in most cases it has been elaborated or even syncopated, since many contests do not realise all the above-mentioned steps. Sometimes it happens that a contract negotiation which takes place at the beginning of the *flyting* event leads directly to the termination of the conflict itself. In such circumstances, one of the most important functions of threat is indeed trying to avoid bloodshed due to the fight. On the contrary, in some other cases *flyting* negotiations can lead to a declaration of peace and neither side wins or loses.

Another type of pattern is the variant implying a guest-host relationship which usually takes place inside the main hall of the host, or at court. This contest theme is obviously the most pertinent to the inquiry of the *flyting* event in *Sir Gawain,* since it occurs, as it has been already stated, at Camelot in the hall where all the knights gathered together for Christmas. Parks thus, outlines this contest pattern as follows:

A. *Engagement*. *G*, a visiting party of one or more warriors, engages in guest-host interactions at the home of *H*, the hosting tribe. Hero *g*, the leader of G, and *h*, the leader of *H*, are marked out as principals.
B. *Flyting*. Hero *h'* provokes *g* into a flyting exchange, Hero *h'* is a member of the hosting party (*H*) yet nonconsaguineous with *h* himself. The flyting has two aspects:
    a. *eris* — *g* and *h'* contend for *kleos* or glory; and
    b. *contract* — *g* and *h'* implicitly or explicitly agree on *X* as the test for their quarrel. *X* is a trial of arms or other manly enterprise that does *not* entail direct, mortal combat between *g* and *h'*.
C. *Trial of arms*. Warrior *g* proves his superiority to *h'* with respect to *X*.
D. *Vaunt*. Hero *g* boasts of his victory.
E. *Ritual resolution*. Heroes *g*, *h* and *h'* terminate the quarrel and renew guest-host interaction through:
        a. *verbal contracts of friendship*: *h'* tries to restore peace by (directly or indirectly) apologizing for his earlier affront and by offering *g* a gift; *g* verbally accepts the offer of friendship.
        b. *symbolic action*: *h* and *h'* give *g* a gift (as corporal acts).

As we can see from the model, this pattern of interactions is far more complicated than the previous one. This occurs not only since the former is a general scheme while this one is related to a specific setting but also because, being located inside a well-defined social environments where different communities are called to engage a guest-host bonding, deep tensions are brought out. These tensions contribute to make the entire event even more formal, for hospitality – a major theme in many early societies – demands peace while *flyting* tends to war.

After having described the paradigms two different types of contest are built on and having seen how both the verbal and the martial aspects are merged into a single event, now it is time to move forward and focus on the *flyting* exchange itself.

Since verbal disputation is an oral genre, we could refer to oral-formulaic research to find some guidance. For instance, in oral-formulaic theory we are aware that repeating narrative episodes have been conceived as type scenes and themes and that such repeating episodes are grounded on formulas, repeatedly used by poets, which constitute the core of the theory itself. So, in order to examine *flyting* as a dialogic expression of fixed contest's structures, Parks singles out that *flyting* is "formulaic in the sense that the principles underlying it are consistent, and as such it may be treated as a traditional oral modality", adding that he will work on two different levels: "that of the individual speech, and that of the dialogue as a joint enterprise." (1990:99).

As it has been outlined before, *flyting* heroes are engaged in two activities – quarrelling and contracting – immediately before the beginning of their fight and, sometimes, these two activities end up representing the fight itself, if the martial outcome has been somehow avoided. The dialectic between the two is best conceived if we look at the fact that, for instance, without the eristic motive – linked to quarrelling – heroes would not want to fight with each other at all. Besides it comes fairly natural that, since quarrelling and contracting are opposed matters, at a particular moment one or the other is liable to predominate over the other, leading for sure to antithetical outcomes of the match. This means that if eristic moments are predominating, speeches during *flyting* events will be thus filled with boasts and insults; whereas if the two contestants has been able to negotiate, then peace will be the only possible conclusion of the quarrel. In short, Parks affirms that "flytings fluctuate between the polarities of the 'purely' eristic (quarrel foregrounded, contract latent) and the 'purely' contractual (contract foregrounded, quarrel latent)" (1990:100). In the end, it is worth noting that the preponderance of the eristic motive constitutes a peculiar precondition of each *flyting* exchange. Generally, when the speaker judges himself as a superior or also equal warrior compared with his adversary then an eristic tone prevails; otherwise, if inferior warriors are involved in conflict they prefer coming to an agreement, even when it was them having proposed to fight.

It is now time to turn to illustrate these movements, or "speech functions", that constitute the typical *flyting* speech, even if its development does not always perform these acts as

a whole. Such speech functions are the following: the identitive, the retrojective, the projective, the attributive-evaluative, and the comparative. Basically, these mean that the flyter usually identifies himself or his adversary; retrojects or narrate some deeds of his or other events happened in the past; projects some possible future happenings regarding him or his adversary; evaluates or attributes some qualities to himself or to his opponent; compares his heroic genealogy or his marvellous deeds to his adversary's disadvantage.

- *Identification*

  At the beginning of the *flyting* speech it is considerably frequent that flyters name their rivals or otherwise provide the opponent with the issue of their identities. Such a common practice could be better understood if we bear in mind one of the purposes of the flyter himself, which is winning *kleos*, so the more famous his adversary is, the greater *kleos* will be.

  Usually, contestants simply name each other, using the nominative or vocative cases, when their identities are already known by the two of them – this is what happens between Unferþ and Bēowulf, since the former refers to the Geats hero by saying "Eart þu se Bēowulf" ("Are you that Bēowulf," 506) while the latter, in the first line of his speech, ironically calls Unferþ "wine min Unferþ" ("my friend Unferth," 530). Otherwise, when one of the combatants or both of them are not aware of their adversaries' identity it happens that one asks the other about his name and sometimes even his genealogy – an example could be the encounter between father and son in the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* in which Hildebrand asks Hadubrand who his ancestors are in order to identifies his antagonist as his own son – while recounting his descent exceeds in the following retrojective act.

- *Retrojection*

  As it has been stated several times before, under an eristic light *flytings* are battles concerned with personal honour and this honour is derived by the hero from his own past deeds and it extends also into the future. This and the following act, the projective one, form together much or most of the explicit topic of the dispute.

  The retrojective function could take two different forms: the narration of past events happened during the life of the hero or in both of the contestants' lives or a genealogy. With reference to the Bēowulf-Unferþ exchange, the narrative

retrojection is built upon the rival versions of an episode pertaining Bēowulf's past, the swimming match with Breca. The heroes then, when they are called to refers back to some facts or performances, have to choose the ones on which their actual strength and reputation are founded. This is why, when they retroject in the sphere of action, the martial domain is usually the chosen one. The other retrojective pathway is, as we have already seen briefly, through genealogical narration.

- *Projection*

  Maybe even more than the retrojective function is the projection one that lays the foundations for the matter of the dispute itself. Contestants, in their *flytings*, indeed project future happenings or future deeds that they wish to pursue and sometimes this is the field on which disagreements between the two adversaries grow. For instance, Unferþ projects that Bēowulf is going to lose against Grendel, whereas Bēowulf is certain that he is going to prevail; their projections are clearly in contradiction with what concerns the outcome but are in agreement with the nature of the challenge, namely "Bēowulf fights Grendel".

- *Attribution-Evaluation*

  The chief and most evident task of the attributive-evaluative function is to bring as much merit as possible to the hero's present state of honour and in order to do so there is no need that this function will take place overtly, in the sense that the mere narrative account can in itself attribute and/or evaluate.

  In any case, there is a close connection between this attributive-evaluative function and the eristic motive in the *flyting* exchange: in fact, as Parks notes, "highly eristic flyting speeches, therefore, are evaluation-maximal; contractually oriented speeches tend to be evaluation-minimal." (1990:112).

- *Comparison*

  If the retrojective, projective and finally attributive-evaluative acts, on the one hand, can refer to the single hero and thus together provide materials for heroic identity, on the other this last function refers to both heroes, for they are both engaged in the *flyting* match. This comparative function, being the only verbal weapon the hero has in order to discredit his opponent, thus gains a remarkable importance in the struggle for *kleos*.

In the end, comparison plays a larger role than any other of the above-mentioned functions for it spins the mechanism that controls *flyting* speeches, since it is "a respondent in naturally inclined to reply to an eristic comparison with a comparison of his own." (Parks 1990:113)

4. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Let us now move to the subject of this enquiry, the fourteenth-century alliterative romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*Sir Gawayn and þe Grene Knyȝt*). As far as its external setting is concerned, the contest between the poem's hero, Gawain, and his mysterious adversary, the Green Knight, follows rather closely the four-step pattern constituted by: Engagement, Flyting, Trial of Arms and Resolution. The *flyting* itself follows its conventional pattern even if it is possible to highlight two different moments in which a *flyting* performative speech is actually performed, or at least a first attempt to cause a reaction from the court due to the Green Knight's words – an attempt, in particular, pointed towards Arthur himself – and then the proper *flyting* engaged between Gawain – nephew to Arthur – and the mysterious knight. The most remarkable feature of the poem is the *Gawain*'s poet new approach to the heroic matter, which differs a lot from the standard treatment exhibited in such narrations. The establishment of the heroic identity through duels and martial strength is not of any concern to the poet; what he has succeeded in doing is to have converted the usual chivalrous "contest" to a "test", filled with moral implications rotating around the concept of 'trawþe' ('fidelity, truth, plighted word'), dear to the poet and to Gawain as well. In the end, the flyting-to-fighting sequence is just a shell, the only connection left with the former heroic world.

The framework in which the encounter between Gawain and the Green Knight is inserted can be quickly recollected. The setting is opened at Camelot during the celebrations for Christmas and the New Year, when King Arthur, sitting among his queen and knights, demands for some strange stories or chivalric marvels to be heard ("[...] Of sum auenturus þyng an vncouþe tale, / Of sum mayn meruayle [....]" ll. 93-4); then, before beginning to feast, Arthur is interrupted by a mysterious knight, green from head to toe – who rides in the court and challenges the Round Table with a rather bizarre contest, which turns out being basically an exchange of blows. Arthur, in a fit of rage caused by the Green Knight's

mocking speech, is willing to take up the challenge himself when Gawain stands up asking for the permission to engage in the fight himself.

These events, the proper flyting-to-fighting sequence and then the second encounter between the two adversaries a year later at the Green Chapel, could be summarised in a pattern like the ones presented beforehand. In my view, the pattern of the *flyting* performed in *Sir Gawain* is a little more complex than the usual one featured in Park's "guest-host variant of the contest theme" (1990:71-77), for I consider the first proposition of the contest by the side of the Green Knight as a *flyting* event, with Arthur accepting the contract, even if the Green Knight has failed to identify himself and has left the precise content of his contract proposal slightly unspecified. Yet at the moment of this first speech, we – and the entire court at Camelot as well – are not aware that a specification of the contract is going to come forth and Arthur factually agrees on the terms of the contract, even if they are lacking. As far as the following meeting at the Green Chapel is concerned we witness two attempts to perform the Trial of Arms, which are spaced out by different steps of the standard *flyting* sequence, before the last and real one that opens at the outcome of the *gomen* ("game") posed by the Green Knight a year before.

- *Engagement.* The Green Knight (*GK*) enters the court at Camelot and engages in guest-host interaction asking where the lord is; Arthur (*A*) replies naming himself as the King of Camelot.
- *Flyting*. The *GK*, urged by *A*, proposes his contest and offers as a reward his own axe (*contract*); as no one seems willing to accept the challenge, the *GK*, mistaking the silence of the knights as induced by fear and not as a sign of astonishment for the oddity of his request, begins to mock Camelot itself and the valour of the knights of the Round Table (*eris*); *A*, in an outburst of anger, takes up the contest.

The sequence is interrupted here due to the request uttered by Gawain of being allowed to accept the Green Knight's challenge on Arthur's behalf. When Gawain becomes the new adversary to the mysterious host, a new sequence could start (l. 375):

- *Engagement*. A hero is now chosen among the hosting tribe, namely the Round Table, in order to engage in battle with the *GK*.

- *Flyting*. The *GK* asks Gawain (*G*) his name and he replies naming himself (*identification*) before repeating the terms of the contract; as a provision, *G* is then asked to search for his adversary in way of returning the blow a year hence (*contract*).
- *Trial of Arms*. *G* finally strikes the *GK* with his axe.

Even this sequence is not totally performed until the very last step. The Green Knight, despite having lost his own head after Gawain's blow while holding it tight in his hand, reminds the other of his oath and rides off (ll. 430-459).
After a year, Gawain sets out to find his adversary so that he can submit to the decapitation pledged in the contract they had agreed upon beforehand. They meet each other in the Green Chapel and, again, they engage in a quarrel. This time a kind of echo-*flyting* is performed, since the Green Knight recognises Gawain and so does the other and they briefly remember their challenge.

- *Engagement*. The hero of the former hosting tribe, *G*, becomes now the guest of the former visiting party - constituted by one warrior, the *GK*.
- *Flyting*. The *GK* recognises *G* (*identification*) and the contract is reaffirmed (*contract*).
  [*Trial of arms (attempt)*. *G* avoids the blow, fearing for his own life.]
- *Flyting*. The *GK* reminds *G* of how he had accepted to submit to the blow and makes a comparison between his behaviour and *G*'s (*retrojection* + *comparison* with a hint of the *attributive-evaluative* function). Then *G* asks to be allowed to submit to another blow stating that he will now be able to accept it (*projection*).
  [*Trial of arms (attempt)*. The *GK* strikes a feint blow.]
  G, enraged, questions even the strength of purpose shown by the *GK* (*attribution-evaluation*).
- *Trial of arms*. The *GK* finally throws his blow and only nicks *G*, who manages to survive.
- *Vaunt*. *G* reminds the *GK* of their contract and that he has won the contest (at least from the martial point of view).

- *Ritual resolution*. In the end, the contract is finally broken up and the *GK* explains his adversary the reasons behind his two feigns:
  — *verbal contract of friendship*: *G* acknowledges his faults during his stay at Bertilak's dwelling.
  — *symbolic action*: *G* is formally given the green girdle that Bertilak's wife has already offered to him.

It is at the end of the poem that the real identity of the Green Knight is finally revealed: he is Bertilak de Hautdesert, the same lord who hosted Gawain in his dwelling before he had reached the Green Chapel, who was changed into the Green Knight by Morgan la Fay, half-sister to Arthur, who wanted to test the Round Table itself and frighten Guinevere.

The passages that contain the flyting-to-fighting sequence in its several declensions comprise a total of 237 lines in the first *fitt* and 167 lines in the fourth and last one.
Before entering into the narration of the *flyting* pattern that prevail throughout the first part of the poem, the *Gawain* poet has decided to devote four long stanzas to the depiction of the appearance of the Green Knight, illustrating both his physical appearance, his garments and his weapon ("[...] And an ax in his oþer, a hoge and vnmete, / A spetos sparþe to expoun in spelle, quoso myȝt."[9], ll. 208-9).

> Þis haþel heldez hym in and þe halle entres,
> Driuande to þe heȝe dece, dut he no woþe,
> Haylsed he neuer one, bot heȝe he ouer loked.
> Þe fyrst word at he warp, 'Wher is', he sayd,
> 'Þe gouernour of þis gyng? Gladly I wolde
> Se þat segg in siȝt, and with hymself speke
> raysoun.'[10]

[9] "[...] And an axe in the other, ugly and monstrous, / a ruthless weapon aright for one in rhyme to describe." (Tolkien 1975: 23)
[10] "Such was he that now hastened in, the hall entering, / pressing forward to the dais - no peril he feared. / To none gave he greeting, gazing above them, and first word that e winged: 'Now where is', he said, / 'the governor of this gathering? For gladly I would / on the same set my sight, and with himself now talk / in town.'" (Tolkien 1975: 23)

(ll. 221-227[11])

The Green Knight makes his appearance all of a sudden, right before Arthur has asks his court to witness a marvel of chivalry, literally bringing the marvellous itself on the scene. He then, fearing no danger, asks to speak with the leader of the gathering and, while he is waiting for receiving an answer, starts to look every knight into their eyes, trying to identify the King. At first, no replies come from the knights or from the other guests gathered together for the New Year's celebration, for everyone is too bewildered by the very greenness of the Knight. It is Arthur who welcomes the visitor warmly, by saying:

> [...] Wyse welcum iwys to þis place,
> Þe hede of þis ostel Arthour I hat;
> Liȝt luflych adoun and lenge, I þe praye,
> And quat-so þy wylle is we schal wyt after.[12] 255

(ll. 252-255)

Since I consider this first cross talk between the Green Knight and Arthur as the first step in a *flyting* sequence, Arthur's reply could be labelled as *identification,* for he identifies himself, stating his positions, and he also invites the stranger to declare his purpose. There are now two pathways that the Green Knight could decide to take: first of all, if he accepted Arthur's welcome the guest-host relation would be settled; otherwise, rejecting – as he does – Arthur's offer to join the festivities, he starts off a *flyting* speech. In fact, he cannot feast, because it would be incompatible with his "errand" ("To wone any quyle in þis won, hit watz not myn ernde"[13], l. 257), so he turns subsequently to the matter for what he has come. After he has lavished praises upon Arthur and his knights, stating that it is thanks to their reputation of men exceedingly worthy in deeds of arms as well as in courtesy that he has come there – the *attributive-evalutative* function is featured in this passage – he confirms that he has no bellicose intention towards them and proves it bearing a branch in his hand ("Ȝe may be seker bi þis braunch þat I bere here / Þat I passe

[11]From now on, every quotes are from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. 1967. Edited by J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon. 2nd ed. Revised by Norman Davies. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

[12] "[...] 'Lord, to this lodging thou'rt welcome! / The head of this household Arthur my name is. / Alight, as thou lovest me, and linger, I pray thee; / and what may thy wish be in a while we shall learn.'" (Tolkien 1975: 24)

[13] "To pass any time in this place was no part of my errand." (Tolkien 1975: 24)

as in pes, and no ply3t seche."[14], ll. 265-6) and wearing no armor. Furthermore, the conclusion of his speech provides a projection of what really sounds as a heroic *flyting* contract offer: "Bot if þou be bold as alle burnez tellen, / Þou wyl grant me godly þe gomen þat I ask / bi ry3t."[15], ll. 272-4). Consequently, the Green Knight proceeds with the account of the challenge he seeks:

Nay, frayst I no fy3t, in fayth I þe telle,
Hit arn aboute on þis bench bot berdlez chylder.
If I were hasped in armes on a he3e stede,
Here is no mon me to mach, for my3tez so wayke.
Forþy I craue in vis court a Crystemas gomen,
For hit is Ȝol and Nwe Ȝer, and here ar 3ep mony:
If any so hardy in isþ hous holdez hymseluen,
Be so bolde in his blod, brayn in hys hede,
Þat dar stifly strike a strok for an oþer,
I schal gif hym of my gyft þys giserne ryche,
Þys ax, þat is heué innogh, to hondele as hym lykes,
And I schal bide þe fyrst bur as bare as I sitte.
If any freke be so felle to fonde þat I telle,
Lepe ly3tly me to, and lach isþ weppen,
I quit-clayme hit for euer, kepe hit as his auen,
An I schal stonde hym a strok, stif on þis flet,
Ellez þou wyl di3t me þe dom to dele hym an oþer barlay,
And 3et gif hym respite,
A twelmonyth and a day;
Now hy3e, and let se tite
Dar any herinne o3t say.[16]

[14] "You may believe by this branch that I am bearing here / that I pass as one in peace, no peril seeking." (Tolkien 1975: 24)
[15] "Yet if thou be so bold, as abroad is published, / thou wilt grant oh thy goodness the game that I ask for / by right." (Tolkien 1975: 25)
[16] "Nay, I wish for no warfare, on my word I tell thee! / Here about on these benches are but beardless children. / Were I hasped in armour on a high charger, / there is no man here to match me - their might is so feeble. / And so I crave in this court only a Christmas pastime, / since it is Yule and New Year, and you are young here and merry. / If any so hardy in this house here holds that he is, / if so bold be his blood or his brain so wild, / that he stoutly dare strike one stroke for another, / then I will give him as my gift this guisarm costly, / this axe - 'tis heavy enough - to handle as he pleases; / and I will abide the first brunt, here bare I sit. / If any fellow be so fierce as my faith to test, / hither let him haste to me and lay hold of his weapon - / I hand it over for ever, he can have it as his own - / and I will stand a stroke from hi, stock-still on this floor, / provided thou'lt lay down this law: that I must deliver him another. / Clam I! /And yet a respite I'll allow, / till a year and a day go by. / Come quick, and let's see now / if any here dare reply!" (Tolkien 1975: 25)

(ll. 279-90)

Before this long speech, Arthur in a brief reply has declared that his "chivalrous" visitor will have received battle if it is what he seeks (ll. 276-8). The Green Knight has already denied such an aim, but nonetheless Arthur recognises that his rhetoric speech has suggested exactly the opposite.

The eristic nature of the Green Knight's words is now brought into light. He opens his discourse through an insulting comparison between him and the knights at Arthur's court by declaring that he does not desire to engage battle against them because they are like "beardless children" ("berdlez chylder", l. 280), unable hence to match him in his strength. Since there is no one worthy enough to fight with him, he offers a "Christmas game" ("Crystemas gomen", l. 283), if there is anyone so bold to accept it. At this point there is no doubt at all that the Green Knight has performed a *flyting* speech with his words, even if the challenge he has posed is an ambiguous one. The *flyting* here has been problematized since, first of all, the Green Knight has not proposed a chivalric contest *stricto sensu*, for his "game" seems to be not so deadly, given that there is the provision of a return blow after twelve months; besides, the distinction between life-threatening and ludic contests is not clear at all in this contest, while flyters usually cannot afford to leave it undetermined. The silence that follows is not induced by fear – as the Green Knight thinks – but by perplexity; so he feels himself legitimated to taunt the knights as follow:

> 'What, is þis Arþures hous,' quoþ þe haþel þenne,
> 'Þat al þe rous rennes of þurȝ ryalmes so mony?
> Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes,
> Your gryndellayk and your greme, and your grete wordes?
> Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Round Table
> Ouerwalt wyth a worde of on wyȝes speche,
> For al dares for drede withoute dynt schewed!'[17]

(ll. 309-15)

[17] 'What! Is this Arthur's house,' said he thereupon, / 'the rumour of which runs through realms unnumbered? / Where now is your haughtiness, and your high conquests, / your fierceness and fell mood, and your fine boasting? / Now are the revels and the royalty of the Round Table / overwhelmed by a word by one man spoken, / for all blench now abashed ere a blow is offered!' (Tolkien 1975: 26)

The Green Knight's charge is particularly aggressive, for he shames Arthur's men by making a comparison between their pride, conquests, fame and accomplishments, for which they are well esteemed, and their frightened silence. Surely it is a charge that demands a prompt reply and the only choice that Arthur's party has is to act, forcing itself to give the Green Knight what he has asked for: being killed with a blow or, if he should miraculously survive, killing in return. Death is always the outcome foreseen by everyone, but only at the end of the poem this interpretation will be proved to be wrong and consequently the contest will be labelled as nonlethal, belonging thus to the guest-host type. It is Arthur himself who takes the initiative:

> [...] 'Haþel, by heuen, þyn askyng is nys,
> And as þou foly hatz frayst, fynde þe behoues.
> I know mo gome þat gast of þy grete wordes;
> Gif me now þy geserne, vpon Godez halue,
> And I schal bayeþn þy bone þat þou boden habbes.'[18]
>
> (ll. 323-7)

This speech, together with Arthur's movements and his countenance, is maybe the most important for what concerns the King's character in the poem. From a stylistic point of view, Arthur has acquired the same way of speaking typical of the Green Knight, rich in expletives ("by heuen", "vpon Godez halue"), insults ("þy grete wordes", "þou foly hatz frayst") and boasts ("I schal bayþen þy bone"). It seems like that, trapped in his fit of rage and feeling ashamed of himself, Arthur has forgotten his famous courtesy. We can detect this new attitude from the fact that he moves away from the dais in order to approach the knight and even from the way he waves the Green Knight's weapon – "Liȝtly lepez he hym to, and laȝt at his honde"[19] (l. 328) – doing exactly what the challenger has demanded before – "Lepe liȝtly me to, and lach þis weppen" (l. 292). When, after these words uttered by Arthur and his fierceness in his being willing to strike, Gawain interrupts with his request to be allowed to take up the challenge Arthur's failure is featured. For the king not only meekly surrenders the axe to Gawain – embodying thus an attitude utterly

[18] [...] 'Marry! Good man, 'tis madness thou askest, / and since folly thou hast sought, thou deservest to find it. / I know no lord that is alarmed by thy loud words here. / Give me now thy guisarm, in God's name, sir, / and I will bring thee the blessing thou hast begged to receive.' (Tolkien 1975: 26)
[19] "Quick then he came to him and caught it from his hand." (Tolkien 1975: 26)

different from the one that has moved him a moment before – but fails in not having accomplished an adventure that he has previously taken up. In a way, Gawain's interruption has proved to be effective both in showing his loyalty to the king and also in saving the integrity of the court itself.

Arthur's failure could be also interpreted as a foreshadowing of the successive Gawain's fall, even if the knight will succeed where the king has failed: in fact, on the one hand Arthur's failure in the contest is a failure in manners due to the fact that, in a way, he was not able to live up to the fame of Camelot. Gawain, on the other,

> saves the fame of Camelot by taking up the adventure with both the bravery and the courtesy for which it is renowned. Yet, since the king himself has failed, it is clear that the hero's triumph can only be temporary. The end will be heavy, Gawain will find himself unable to maintain his perfect character, and he too will desert his renowned courtesy to descent momentarily to the churlish level of his opponent. (Benson, 1965: 218)

For me þink hit not semly, as hit is doþ knawen,
Þer such an askyng is heuened so hyȝe in your sale,
Þaȝ ȝe ȝuorself be talenttyf, to take hit to yourseluen,
Whil mony so bolde yow aboute vpon bench sytten,
Þat vnder heuen I hope non haȝerer of wylle,
Ne better bodyes on bent þer baret is rered.
I am þe wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,
And lest lur of my lyf, quo laytes þe soþe □
Bot for as much as ȝe ar myn em I am only to prayse,
No bounté bot your blod I in my bodé knowe;
And syþen þis note is so nys þat noȝt hit yow falles,
And I haue frayned hit at yow fyrst, foldez hit to me;
And if I carp not comlyly, let alle þis cort rych
bout blame.[20]

(ll. 348-61)

Gawain enters now the Engagement process or, even better, he with his speech opens a new phase in the process, suspending the previous *flyting* sequence involving Arthur and

[20] "For I found it unfitting, as in fact it is held, / when a challenge in your chamber makes choice so exalted, / though yourself be desirous to accept it in person, / while many bold men about you on bench are seated: / on earth there are, I hold, none more honest of purpose, / no figures fairer on field where fighting is waged, / I am the weakest, I am aware, and in wit feeblest, / and the least loss, if I live not, if one would learn the truth. / Only because you are my uncle is honour given me: save your blood in my body I boast of no virtue; / and since this affair is foolish that is nowise befits you, / and I have requested it first, accord it then to me! / If my claim in uncalled-for without cavil shall judge / this court.' (Tolkien 1975: 27)

the Green Knight. Such a speech participates also to the *flyting,* since he secures for himself the role as a (second) Green Knight's adversary. As for the eristic aspect of his words, he does not miss to highlight the foolishness of the proposed challenge, as well as indirectly retrojecting when he makes an allusion to his being nephew to Arthur, stressing the importance of having the same blood as Arthur's in his veins, as if it was – and surely it is – a worthy reason to boast about. Furthermore, the profession of personal inadequacy is rather common to the heroic ethos but, since for a flyter has a crucial relevance defending his own honour, Gawain thus evaluates himself by designating himself as representative of Arthur and his court (Parks 1990: 156).

Now that the Green Knight has finally found an adversary who is going to engage battle with him for sure, in a brief speech he makes two requests: that the knight identifies himself and that he repeats the terms of their contract. In this way, the first step of the *identification* is performed - "'In good fayth', quoþ þe goode knyȝt, 'Gwain I hatte, / Þat bede þe þis buffet, quat-so bifallez after, / And at þis tyme twelmonyth take at þe an oþer / Wyth what weppen so þou wylt, and wyth no wyȝ ellez / on lyue.'"[21] (ll. 381-5) - and consequently another specific provision is added:

> '[...] And þou hatz redily rehersed, bi resoun ful trwe,
> Clanly al þe couenaunt þat I þe kynge asked,
> Saf þat þou schal siker me, segge, bi þi trawþe,
> Þat þou schal seche me þiself, where-so þou hopes
> I may be funde vpon folde, and foch þe such wages
> As þou deles me to-day bifore þis douþe ryche.'[22]
>
> (ll. 392-7)

According to this speech and consequently to the Green Knight's will, Gawain has to agree to be he himself the one who must seek him out in twelve months, no other. In order to do so, the knight asks his adversary for his name and address – "'[...] I wot neuer where

[21] "'In good faith,' quoth the good knight, 'I Gawain am called / who bring thee this buffet, let be what may follow; / at this time a twelvemonth in thy turn have another / with whatever weapon thou wilt, and in the world with / none else but me.'" (Tolkien 1975: 28)

[22] "'[...] And thou hast promptly repeated and plainly hast stated / without abatement the bargain I begged of the king here; / save that thou must assure me, sir, on thy honour / that thou'lt seek me thyself, search where thou thinkest / I may be found near or far, and fetch thee such payment / as thou deliverest me today before these lordly people.'" (Tolkien 1975: 28)

þou wonyes, bi hym þat me wroȝt, / Ne I know not þe, knyȝt, þy cort ne þi name.’’’[23] (ll. 399-400) – but he denies such a concession, at least before not having received the stipulated blow. So, if the Green Knight will survive he will then reveal his particulars to Gawain; otherwise “‘[...] And if I spende no speche, þenne spedez þou þe better, / For þou may leng in þy londe and layt no fyrre.’’’[24] (ll. 410-11).

Throughout this interchange, we could observe that the Green Knight has finally abandoned his churlishness, which has characterised his previous words towards Arthur and the court, and he now focuses on the identitive and projecting-contractual aspects of *flyting*. Nonetheless, he avoids naming himself (for the second time), making Gawain to fight against an unknown – a very odd circumstance rarely featured in heroic epos, where, as we have already explained beforehand, knowing the identity of the adversary is a key factor in the struggle for winning *kleos*. An ambiguous field, opened to several interpretation, is now being presented to the reader: this field is the one concerning the contest itself and the issue of the Green Knight’s identity, which is consequently linked to his honesty. As it will be clear at the end of the poem, the Green Knight himself is not interested at all in the exchange of blows – namely, the matter which he and Gawain agreed on – while his true desire is to see whether or not Gawain will honour his pledged words (“trawþe”, l. 394), as it is duty to a knight, despite the prospect (only apparent in the end) of certain death. In fact, according to the heroic code the bonding between words and deeds is a fundamental issue, since a proper knight involving in a flyting event cannot help but live up his reputation and acts correspondingly to his previous exhibited willingness. This is the exact situation in which Gawain is involved: as he represents the typical hero he has to respond to the Green Knight’s proposal in the only way he and his “trawþe” know, by accepting the challenge and fight accordingly. But it is in doing this that he is misled,

> for neither the Green Knight nor the *Gawain* poet is so much concerned with martial externalizations of heroism as with the *interior reality* of those corresponding human qualities. The contest openly contracted on is not the real test. It is merely a facade, a cover for a deeper probing into the interiorities of Gawain’s mind and soul. (Parks 1990: 157).

[23] “‘[...] I have never learned where thou livest, by the Lord that made me, / and i know thee not, thy name nor thy court.’” (Tolkien 1975: 28)

[24] “‘[...] and if I waste not a word, thou’lt win better fortune, / for thou mayst linger in thy land and look no further.’” (Tolkien 1975: 29)

At this moment in the poem the contract has been established and confirmed too, so the action can finally take over and the decapitation of the Green Knight can be performed. If the appearance of a knight completely green from head to toe would not have been marvellous enough, here it is another evidence that Arthur has received precisely what he had asked for at the beginning of the poem: the very severed head of the Green Knight indeed delivers the final speech of this first part of the *flyting* exchange.

> ‘Loke, Gawan, þou be grayþe to go as þou hettez,
> And layte as lelly til þou me, lude, fynde,
> As þou hartz hette in þis halle, herande þise kny3tes;
> To þe grene chapel þou chose, I charge þe, to fotte
> Such a dunt as þou hatz dalt □ disserued þou habbez
> To be 3ederly 3olden on New Ȝeres morn.
> Þe kny3t of þe grene chapel men knowen me mony;
> Forþi me for fynde if þou fraystez, faylez þou neuer.
> Þerfore come, oþer recreaunt be calde þe behouses.’[25]
>
> (ll. 448-56)

For the last time in this section the two themes of *contract* and *identity* recur again: first of all, Gawain is asked for the second time to seek the Green Knight in twelve months, otherwise he will be declared a “recreaunt”, a coward (l. 456); then, the Green Knight’s identity is finally attested but this self-identification is not complete at all. The visitor names himself as the Knight of the Green Chapel, adding that this is the name by which everyone knows him, while at the end of the poem we will be informed that the real identity of the knight is the one of Bertilak de Hautdesert. So, the Green Knight has lacked anew in truthfulness and trustworthiness towards his adversary, Gawain.

The first *fitt* then, is closed by an apostrophe to Gawain form the poet himself: “Now þenk wel, Sir Gawan, / For woþe þat þou ne wonde / Þis auenture for to frayn / Þat þou hatz tan on honde.”[26] (ll. 487-90). This apostrophe could be maybe interpreted as the poet’s

[25] “‘See thou get ready, Gawain, to go as thou vowedst, / and as faithfully seek till thou find me, good sir, / as thou hast promised in this place in the presence of these knights. / To the Green Chapel go thou, and get thee, I charge thee, / such a dint as thou hast dealt - indeed thou hast earned / a nimble knock in return on New Year’s morning! / The Knight of the Green Chapel I am known to many, / so if to find me thou endeavour, thou’lt fail not to do so. / Therefore come! Or to be called a craven thou deservest.’” (Tolkien 1975: 30)

[26] “Sir Gawain, now take heed / lest fear make thee refrain / from daring the dangerous deed / that thou in hand hast ta’en.!” (Tolkien 1975: 31)

will to remind Gawain of seeking the Green Knight, since the heroic epos demands that deeds must follow the words.

As for the *fitt* 2 and 3, which constitute the large portion of the romance, they appear at first reading as a digression and it is exactly the purpose of the *Gawain* poet. It seems like, we readers are called to take on the point of view of Gawain himself and then being misled, as the knight is, by the apparent lack of correlation between the *flyting*, occurring in the first *fitt*, and Gawain's stay at Bertilak's dwelling in the following two. What we have missed and what makes Gawain's failure too is not having recognised that Arthur's nephew has been examined on the facets of his humanity since the beginning and then, that having accepted the lady's offer of the green girdle is what has occasioned the hero's "fall". The missing ring of the chain, both for the reader and for Gawain, is that his host is actually the Green Knight and that his encounters with Lady Bertilak play a conspicuous role in the "test" posed by the Green Knight himself.

Finally, in the last section of the poem the martial combat element displayed in Park's contest pattern is performed (1990: 50), even if a glimpse of it has already been revealed in the first *fitt*. Such combat element does not provide us with the outcome of the hero's victory or failure in battle but it simply shows to the reader the failure previously occurred.

The setting is now the Green Chapel, where the Green Knight is host and Sir Gawain is thus the guest. First of all, the two adversaries recognise each other and then the contract is reaffirmed again. Everything is ready for the blow to be returned when Gawain exhibits a slight weakness trying to avoid the Green Knight's first stroke. This opens the way to the the Green Knight to perform another *flyting* abuse, through comparative retrojection:

'Þou art not Gawayn,' quoþ þe gome, 'þat is so goud halden,
Þat neuer arȝed for no here by hylle ne be vale,
And now þou fles for ferde er þou fele harmez!
Such cowardise of þat kniȝt cowþe I neuer here.
Nawþer fyked I ne flaȝe, freke, quen þou myntest,
Ne kest no kauelacion in kyngez hous Arthor.
My hede flaȝ to my fote, and ȝet flaȝ I neuer;
And þou, er any harme hent, arȝez in hert;
Wherfore þe better burne me burde be called

þerfore.’[27]

(ll. 2270-9)

Gawain, who has managed to avoid being considered a coward (l. 456) since he has succeeded in seeking after the Green Knight and then finding him in the Green Chapel, has now gained such an epithet for having shown a slight hesitation in trying to flinch from the stroke. An attribution-evaluation opens this speech, for the Green Knight attributes Gawain to having avoided the stroke in order not to suffer any injuries and thus he accuses him of being a coward (actually he denies that such a knight could be Gawain himself); this leads to a loss of honour in Gawain’s behalf. Then, a comparison (plus a retrojection) is performed: the Green Knight reminds Gawain of the fact that he has not sidestepped from his blow and that he has not questioned about the challenge too. Gawain’s reply finally makes evident a fundamental issue: that such a contest is not fair at all since once Gawain’s head has been cut off it cannot be restored as the Green Knight's did. This means that the challenge actually pits heroism against magic (here it is a subtle hint to the involvement of someone who possesses magical powers, someone whom we will be able to identify as the one who, in the first place, sent the Green Knight to Camelot, namely Morgan la Fay, as we will be told in due course), yet Gawain still reaffirms his willingness to put the contract to an end. But the *flyting* abuse continues with Gawain now losing his characteristic chivalric behaviour in order to speak in a churlish way, typical of the Green Knight himself. In fact, in a fit of rage following the Green Knight’s feint swing, the hero pushes for his adversary to finally strike him by saying:

‘Wy! þresch on, þou þro mon, þou þretez to longe; 2300
I hope þat þi hert arȝe wyth þyn awen seluen.’[28]

(ll. 2300-1)

[27] “‘Thou’rt not Gawain,’ said the green man, ‘who is so good reported, / who never from any foes on fell or in dale; / and now thou fleest in fear, ere thou feelest a hurt! / Of such cowardice that knight I ne’er heard accused. / Neither blenched I nor backed, when thy blow, sir, thou aimedst, / nor uttered any cavil in the court of King Arthur. / My head flew to my feet, and yet fled I never; thou, ere thou hast any hurt, in thy heart qualiste, / and so the nobler knight to be named deserve / therefore.’” (Tolkien 1975: 84-5)

[28] “‘Why! lash away, thou lusty man! Too long dost thou threaten. / ‘Tis thy heart methinks in thee that now quaileth!’” (Tolkien 1975: 85)

Such words uttered by Gawain could be interpreted as an attempt to respond to the previous verbal attack from the Green Knight's behalf, the one carrying the implication of cowardice. Cowardice that is again the insinuation that lingers here under the surface of such a peremptory request for action. It seems that now Gawain tries to echo the preceding received accusation thanks to the comparative attribution quoted beforehand. As a result, the time has finally come for the Green Knight to return the blow: Gawain stays still, waiting for his death to come. But the stroke only nick his neck and then the hero feels himself to be allowed to intimate his adversary to stop his blows, since the contract has been completely fulfilled. Gawain's victory is only illusory or, at least, he really could have won under the actual martial contest point of view. Gawain's failure, instead, is going to be clearly revealed by the following Green Knight's words:

'Bolde burne, on þis bent be not so gryndel.
No mon here vnmanerly þe mysboden habbez,
Ne kyd bot as couenaunde at kyngez kort schaped.
I hyȝt þe a strok and þou hit hatz, halde þe wel payed;
I relece þe of þe remnaunt of ryȝtes alle oþer.
If I deliuer had bene, a boffet paraunter
I couþe wroþeloker haf waret, to þe haf wroȝt anger.
Fyrst I mansed þe muryly with a mynt one,
And roue þe wyth no rof-sore, with ryȝt I þe profered
For þe forwarde þat we fest in þe fyrst nyȝt,
And þou trystyly þe trawþe and trwly me haldez,
All eþ gayne þow me gef, as god mon schulde.
Þat oþer munt for þe morne, mon, I þe profered,
Þou kyssedes my clere wyf þe cossez me raȝtez.
For boþe two here I þe bede bot two bare myntes
boute scaþe.
Trwe mon trwe restore,
Þenne þar mon drede no waþe.
At þe þrid þou fayled þore,
And þerfor þat tappe ta þe. [...][29]

[29] "'Fearless knight on this field, so fierce do not be! / No man here unmannerly hath thee maltreated, / nor aught given thee not granted by agreement at court. / A hack I thee vowed, and thou'st had it, so hold thee content; / I remit thee the remnant of all rights I might claim. / If I brisker had been, a buffet, it may be, / I could have handed thee more harshly, and harm could have done thee. / First I menaced thee in play with no more than a trial, / and clove thee with no cleft: I had a claim to the feint, / for the fast pact we affirmed on the first evening, and thou fairly and unfailing didst faith with me keep, / all thy gains thou gavest, as goodman ought. / The other trial for the morning, man, I thee tendered / when thou kissedst my comely wife, and the kisses didst render. / For the two here I offered only two harmless feints / make. / The true

(ll. 2338-57)

The Green Knight then continues by explaining in depth where Gawain's failure lies: on the third day, after having returned properly his winnings of the previous two days, he failed to offer up the green girdle, desiring to save his own life by doing so. This is the final proof that the *flyting* contract has been linked with a later contract and it could have been possible due to the fact that the Green Knight and the host are the same person. Finally, the Green Knight concludes his speech by identifying himself: his name is Bertilak de Hautdesert and he has been only a pawn in Morgan la Fay's game. So, it was true that when the Green Knight made his entrance at Camelot he did not mean any harms and that he did exclusively want to offer a "Christmas game". The contest then, was of the guest-host type, namely nonlethal and ludic. As for Bertilak, he has honoured all the terms of his contracts and it is an important issue for the fact that the poem seems to accept the heroic code, though its most valuable quality is having succeeded in converting the outer shell of heroic action into an allegory of Gawain's soul (Parks 1990: 159).

shall truly repay, / for no peril then need he quake. / Thou didst fail on the third day, / and so that tap now take! [...]" (Tolkien 1975: 87)

IV. *Bēowulf*, the hero and his enemies: an inquiry in fiendish epithets and periphrases

1. Definition of the analysis terms

In order to follow a mechanical criterion I should have applied the same method of analysis, used in the previous chapter, to the following text – *Bēowulf* – which this new chapter is concerned with. Hence, it would have been obvious to highlight the episode, which occupies the lines from 499 to 606, featuring Unferþ – one of the King of the Scylding's thanes, who is first envious of Bēowulf and then a supporter of him by lending him his own sword, Hrunting – and Bēowulf himself, in which another *flyting* event is performed[30]. But, by doing so, the main focus of my thesis would have gone necessarily missed. In fact, the essential connection which keep the Hero and his Enemy (or Enemies in this case, as we will see later on) united and which constitutes the main theme of the present study should be borne in mind. It is true, however, that, at least under a certain light, also Unferþ could be seen as an adversary to Bēowulf if not even as an enemy in the first instance of their encounter when, during a feast at Heorot – the extraordinary palace built by Hrōþgār where the first part of the poem is settled – Unferþ begins to provoke the hero reminding him of a foolish contest which he engaged in with Breca when they were younger. The *flyting* sequence is well-performed but it does not culminate in a *fighting* exchange, since, after the long reply uttered by Bēowulf, the King of the Scylding and his Queen make their entrance in the hall, greeting the hero and wishing him that he could succeed in his aiming at defeating Grendel.

The missed development of the *flyting* event into the following *fighting* one, constitutes thus the first difference between this skirmish between Unferþ and Bēowulf and the one (or better, the twos) featured in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, involving both Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The main difference regards the very nature of the

[30] For an overall analysis of the Bēowulf-Unferþ episode and an interpretation of the warrior himself, Cf. Brodeur 1969: 144 ff.

adversary: if Unferþ is without any doubt a human being, the Green Knight could not be simply labelled as human, since he is completely infused with a supernatural aura. This is why I have preferred to avoid a second pragmatic analysis of a *flyting* exchange, even if such a choice would have been maybe more coherent with the previous chapter, and opted turning instead to focus on the three foes that Bēowulf is called to fight against in the poem – namely Grendel, his mother and finally the dragon – who share indeed a beyond human nature. Nothing only vaguely related to a *flyting* sequence is performed against any of these creatures, we witness hence only mere and brutal fights without any words uttered. This is fairly obvious when the battle involves an adversary such as the dragon, who is of course unable to speak, but nothing of the sort is ever said about Grendel or his mother, so we are not aware whether the two monsters can actually speak or not. In any case, Grendel cannot be engaged in a *flyting* event since it seems that he does not belong to mankind and "flyting brings fighting into the human ken" (Parks 1990: 22).

In order to shed more light on the figure of the enemy whom the hero has to defeat, I found that a further investigation into the many ways of addressing to such creatures throughout the text could be very revealing. In doing so, I will analyse firstly the several periphrases as well as epithets, used to denote Grendel, his mother and the dragon, paying attention to point out for each of them if they are authorial ones (°) or if they are employed in other character's speeches (* for Bēowulf; • for any other persons); then I will divide these periphrases and epithets in suitable semantic categories. I am firmly convinced that through such an inquiry it is possible to obtain a much more complete characterization of a single figure beyond the respective brief description sometimes given in the text.

Finally, before starting our analysis of these epithets and periphrases it might be useful to linger over a brief overall definition of what is intended as poetic vocabulary in Old English poetry. One of the peculiarity of this poetry lies in its vocabulary, in fact a large number of words – not exactly words that represents unusual concepts since many of them signify quite common terms, like "man" or "warrior"– are found exclusively, or almost exclusively, in poetry. Another characteristic is that Old English is a compounding language, so new words are usually formed on the basis of old ones, with the result that most of them are rather redundant. Normally, a compound consists of a base word (the second element) with a modifier (the first element) but in Old English we are presented with compounds in which the first element does not modify the second one while its

function is to fill out the rhythm of a line and supply alliteration (such compounds are called *poetic compounds*). It happens sometimes, also in poetic compounds, that the first element does modify the second one and in this case the compound is called *kenning* (the *Bēowulf* poem provides some unique ones). Furthermore, *kenningar* could not always be compounds but compound-like phrases constituting, generally, of two nouns, the first usually in the genitive case.

2. Grendel

As it is well-known, Grendel is the first enemy Bēowulf meets in the poem, or we could rather affirm that he is the trigger of the entire action, since the hero, having been reached by the news of the repeated raids perpetrated by Grendel at night against the Scyldings, has decided to leave his country with some warriors and lend his support to King Hrōþgār and his people.

Grendel is introduced in the narration for the first time in line 100 – if we set aside, for the moment the very first mention of the creature in line 86, where he is indeed defined as a powerful spirit, *se ellengæst*, who lives in the darkness, away from the happiness and mirth of the royal hall at Heorot – while he is named in line 102:

> Swā ðā drihtguman drēamum lifdon,
> ēadiglīce, oð ðæt ān ongan
> fyrene fre(m)man fēond on helle;
> wæs se grimma gæst Grendel hāten,
> mære mearcstapa, sē þe mōras hēold,
> fen ond fæsten; fīfelcynnes eard
> wonsælī wer weardode hwīle,
> siþðan him Scyppend forscrifen hæfde
> in Cāines cynne —[31]
>
> (Klaeber 1950: ll. 99-107a)

[31] "So times were pleasant for the people there / until finally one, a fiend out of hell, / began to work his evil in the world. / Grendel was the name of this grim demon / haunting the marches, marauding round the heath / and the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time / in misery among the banished monsters, / Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed / and condemned as outcasts." (Heaney 1999: 6)

Even in a so short passage we are immediately informed about the ambiguity which characterises the figure of Grendel. In fact, if we look at the words employed by the *Bēowulf*-poet, first of all the creature is defined in relation to what is being considered his "true" dwelling, namely the Hell – *fēond on helle* (l. 101) – then he is (again) identified with an evil spirit, a demon – *grimma gæst* (l. 102). The peculiar feature of his being solitary and wandering is shown in the use of the periphrasis *mære mearcstapa* (l. 103) which follows and, finally, he is also addressed as *wonsæli wer* (l. 105), in which it is the word *wer* that places some issues for being usually used to signify "a male person". All of these matters will be discussed later on in-depth.

Another important piece of information about Grendel we can infer from the quoted text above is that, according to the author, he – and his mother too – belongs to Cain's progeny. In fact, in days of yore it was believed that all the monsters, the giants and the devils descend from Cain himself, following a tradition established by the apocryphal *Book of Enoch* and also by the Jewish and Christian interpretation of the verses 2 and 4 of Genesis, VI[32]:

> 2. The sons of God seeing the daughters of men, that they were fair, took to themselves wives of all which they chose.
> 4. Now giants were upon the earth in those days. For after the sons of God went in to the daughter of men, and they brought forth children, these are the mighty men of old, men of renown.

where the "sons of God" were interpreted as the sons of Seth and the "daughters of men" as the daughters of Cain[33]. Furthermore, in *Bēowulf* too is given a brief account of such evil progeny:

> Þanon untydras ealle onwōcon,
> eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas,
> swylce gīgantas, þā wið Gode wunnon
> lange þrāge; hē him ðæs lēan forgeald.[34]

[32] Biblical quotations are taken from the Douay translation of the Vulgate.
[33] For further investigations on the matter, Cf. Mellinkoff 1979: 143-62.
[34] "[...] and out of the curse of his exile there sprang / ogres and elves and evil phantoms / and the giants too who strove with God / time and again until He gave them their reward." (Heaney 1999: 6)

(Klaeber 1950: ll. 111-14)

Since Grendel himself will be later identified as an *eoten* ("giant", ll. 113, 761, 883, 902), his being of Cain's kin is thus completely attested in the poem and the very fact that such a progeny exists is one of the reasons for his being also named as an enemy of God, *Godes andsaca* ("God's enemy", ll. 786, 1682).

A brief description of the places where Grendel used to live in is also given in the above-mentioned lines and then resound later in the words of King Hrōþgār (1357b-76a). Basically, if we read the passage in the light of the corresponding description of an akin scenery in the *Grettissaga*, as Klaeber himself suggests in his edition, we have to acknowledge that Grendel's abode did not differ much in its essential features from the one described in the Icelandic saga and furthermore that such features were distorted and obscured in the English poem due to the introduction of later "conceptions of the Christian hell" (Klaeber 1950: 186-7)[35].

As for the name *Grendel* finally, Klaeber has suggested several possible etymologies: a first one relates the name to OE. *grindan* "to grind", hence "destroyer" and to OE. **grandor* in *grandorlēas* (*Jul.* 271), ON. *grand* "evil", "injury"; a second etymology of the name could be related to OE. *grindel* "bar", "bolt" (*Gen. B* 384), OHG. *grindel*, *krintil*; *Grendel*, related to ON. *grindhill*, one of the poetical terms for "storm", *grenja* "to bellow"; another one offers a formation by means of *-ila* from Lat. *grandis*; finally, the last possible etymology suggested relates *Grendel* to **grandil* from **grand* "sand", "bottom (ground) of a body of water (Klaeber, 1950: xxviii-xxix).

Let us now turn to the analysis of the several periphrasis employed in the poem. As it has been explained before, "°" is used when a term is employed in authorial places of the text, "*" when Bēowulf uses one of them, while "•" when the users are Hrōþgār or Hygelāc, in this case.

—*se ellen-gæst*° (m. l. 86): "powerful or bold demon" (Klaeber 1950), "a bold or powerful spirit" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *ellen-gæst*) with the demonstrative pronoun *se*, "the". This compound word is attested only in *Bēowulf* (hapax legomenon) and it is

[35] For a different interpretation on the matter, Cf. Malone 1958. Also, Mellinkoff compares Grendel and his mother's abode with the ones of the biblical creatures of Leviathan and Behemoth (1979: 151-4).

formed on OE. *ellen*, "strength, power, vigour, courage" – apparently a reduced form for OE. *ellærn* that later has developed as the Mo.E. *elder* – and from OE. *gast, gæst*, "breath" but also "spirit, soul, ghost".

Klaeber proposes that this compound could be a corruption of OE. *ellor-gaest*, "alien spirit", "a spirit living or going elsewhere, a departing spirit" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *ellor-gást*) in which the connotation of a wandering creature, usually attributed to Grendel himself is thus present. Such characteristic is also peculiar to the suggestion promoted by Tolkien (2003: 71), who points out that in some places in the poem *gast, gæst* could be considered as a corruption of *gæst, gest*, "stranger"; the suggestion follows on the basis of the meaning of other epithets applied to Grendel, such as *cwealmcuma* (l. 792), "murderous visitor" or *wælgæst* (ll. 1331, 1995), "murderous sprite". Furthermore, Tolkien adds that a word such as *gæst* could not be translated with "ghost" or "spirit", since "creature" is in his opinion the most accurate translation that could be employed. On the other hand, *gæst* is sometimes used in its meaning of "spirit, ghost" when applied to Grendel in connection to other spirits on the basis of his nature and his similarity with them.

As far as the occurrences of *gast, gæst* are concerned, this noun is frequently used together with different adjectives and nouns, such as: nms.wk. *grimma* (l. 102), "fierce, savage, cruel, grim, horrible" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, *grim*); gsm. *wergan* (l. 133), "accursed, evil" (Klaeber 1950)[36]; gs. *helle* (l. 1274)[37], "hell" but *helle gast* is rendered with "a spirit of hell, an infernal spirit" (Bosworth-Toller 1921, s.v. *helle gast*), a periphrasis that constitutes another indication for the *Bēowulf*-poet's will of establishing a connection between Grendel and the devil (Malmberg 1977: 242). Two *kenningar* are attested too, both hapax legomena: *ellor-gast, -gæst* (ll. 807, 1349 – where it is used of both Grendel and his mother - 1617, 1621), "alien spirit" (Klaeber 1950), which sharpens one of the peculiar differences between Grendel – and his mother too – and Bēowulf, namely his being excluded from any sort of social congregation; *wæl-gæst* (ll. 1331 – referred to Grendel's mother – 1995), "murderous sprite" (Klaeber 1950), "a deadly guest (spirit?), a murderous guest" (Bosworth-Toller, 1898, s.v. *wæl-gæst*).

[36] In line 1747 the Devil himself is denoted with the same epithet used of Grendel at line 133, *werga gast*.

[37] From the genitive *helle* the ME. adj. *helle, hellen* 'hellish', used in relation to the usurers too, has developed; also *feond on helle* could be used in such a meaning: Wyclif employs *fend on helle* for signifying an itinerant fryer walking through England as Grendel did walk through Denmark (Tolkien 2003: 71)

—*fēond on helle*° (*fēond* m., *helle* f. ds.; l. 101): lit. "fiend in hell" even if it is usually translated with "hellish fiend". This periphrasis has caused considerable anxiety to both editors and translators of the *Bēowulf* poem. According to Malcolm Andrew's research, which is dated 1981 and can therefore nowaday be inaccurate, there is only a literal translation of it, by R. K. Gordon (1926), "fiend in hell", while others avoid such literal rendition going for different periphrases as "Devil in Hell" (Bone 1945), "a fiend of the pit" (Crawford 1926) and "a certain fiend out of hell" (Alfred 1963). Other translators employ more subtle rendition: "hellish fiend" (Crossley-Holland 1968), "that demon, that fiend" (Raffel 1963), "hell in his mind" (Morgan 1952); Clark Hall (1950), on his turn, omits the phrase, hence avoiding the impasse of a translation[38]. As for the editors, Arnold in 1976 renders this periphrasis as "a fiend in hell" without any comment; in 1887, Bugge proposes an emendation of *helle* with *healle*, "hall", since Grendel does not live literally in hell; Klaeber, in 1950, glosses "hellish fiend" providing no comment at all[39].

Kemp Malone (1960: 193, note no. 4) gives his personal explanation on the matter as follows:

> Those who defended the MS reading do so by taking the phrase *on helle* as nothing more than a pejorative tag, equivalent to *hellic* 'hellish' in its well-attested sense 'befitting hell, extremely wicked'. But the poet represents Grendel as living not indeed in Satan's abode proper but in a veritable hell on earth [...]. When therefore we are told that Grendel was *on helle* 'in hell' we must take the phrase in its literal sense.

On the other hand, Andrew proposes that the poet uses *feond in helle* for he wants to mean precisely that, alluding to the conceptions of hell and sin well-known from the writings of the Church Fathers, writings that has to be checked in order to better understand the very nature of these implications.

—*(mǣre) mearcstapa*° (m. ll. 103, 1348 – used to refer also to Grendel's mother): "(notorious) wanderer in the waste borderland" (Klaeber 1950). In his edition Klaeber, unfortunately does not present any differences in the meaning of the adjective, proposing only "well-known" and "notorious" as suitable translations in lines 103 and 762. On the

[38] For bibliographical references to the translations quoted, Cf. Malcolm 1981.
[39] Malcolm 1981.

other hand, the adjective possesses several meanings, according to the Bosworth-Toller dictionary: generally, it is used to qualify positively persons or things as "great, excellent, distinguished, sublime, famous, widely known"; in particular it could be attributed to persons both in a good sense and in a bad one, so it assumes the meaning of "notorious, distinguished by evil deeds", which is the case presented in *Bēowulf* in lines 103 and 762, even if this second place poses some perplexities. In order to attempt to solve such a discrepancy, Kiessling proposes that in these two instances the poet who first recorded the *Bēowulf* story could have been used *mære* – with a short diphthong – meaning "incubus, night monster". This assumption could be explained bearing in mind that "Old English copyists were not at all systematic in their use of diacritical marks" (Kiessling 1968: 192) and that in the poem the word *mǣre*, "famous", is used several times to describe individuals of heroic stature.

—*wonsǣli wer*° (*wonsǣli* adj, *wer* m., l. 105): "unhappy man" (Klaeber 1950). The adjective *wonsǣli* appears to be used only in poetry and this is its one and only occurrence throughout the poem.

The masculine noun *wer* has as its first meaning "a man, a male person" (Bosworth-Toller 1989, s.v. *wer*) but in the dictionary it is also listed another meaning of "a being in the form of a man", together with the instance of line 105 itself.

It is worth to be noted that this is the first time in *Bēowulf* that Grendel is identified with a noun usually referred to ordinary men.

—*wiht un-hǣlo*° (*wiht* f., *un-hǣlo* wk.f., l. 120): "creature of evil" (Klaeber 1950). This is the only occurrence of the weak feminine noun *unhǣlo* in poetry while it is not as rare in prose; as for its meaning, the Bosworth-Toller dictionary indicates a first meaning related to persons or animals – "bad health, disease" – and a second one, specific for the *Bēowulf* place, meaning "misfortune, mishap". In particular, the term is a compound forms on a negative prefix *un-* followed by the noun *hǣlu* whose meanings are, among others, "healing, a cure, well-being" (Bosworth-Toller 1921, s.v. *hǣlu*). Klaeber, in his notes, points out that *wiht unǣlo* "has been taken by several scholars as "anything of evil" and made the close of the preceding clause (a second variation)." (1950: 132)

—*lað* (adj. ll. 134°, 440*, 815°, 841°, 929•), "hateful, grievous, hostile" (Klaeber 1950). It is also used as a noun, whose meaning is "foe", as it is in the poem.

—*heal-ðegn*° (gs. -ðegnes, l. 142): "hall-thane" (Klaeber 1950), "a hall-thane, one who resides or is occupied in a hall" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *heal-ðegn*). The noun is a hapax legomenon and it is surely used with an ironic hue in this passage, meaning that at night, when Grendel usually attacks Heorot, he possesses the power to control the hall too. Such a connotation is strengthened by the parallel occurrence of the word at line 719 (ap. *healðegnas*) where it is referred to Bēowulf and his warriors who are now defending Heorot from Grendel, and basically are the proper "hall-thanes".

—*fēond* (m. ll. 143°, 279*, 439*, 698°, 725°, 748°, 962*, 970*, 984*, 1273°, 1669*): "enemy, fiend" (Klaeber 1950).

—*āglǣca, ǣglǣca*° (m. l. 159): "wretch, monster, demon, fiend (used chiefly of Grendel and the dragon)", also "warrior, hero" in lines 893, 2592 (Klaeber 1950). It is usually assumed by scholars that, unlike Klaeber's notation, the only two places in the poem where this noun is used with the positive meaning of "warrior, hero" are in line 893 – referred to the hero Sigemund – and in line 2592, used of Bēowulf himself (and the dragon too). In the Bosworth-Toller dictionary, we find the following definition: "a miserable being, wretch, monster" (1898). ME. *ēglēche* attested in the Middle English Dictionary shows the sense of "brave, fearless", providing some quotes where it is used of men. So it does the Oxford English Dictionary for the entry *egleche*, meaning "valiant". In other Anglo-Saxon texts it is said to be used in reference to monsters, devils, Satan and the Fallen Angels, while in *Andreas* is used of human beings, as in *Bēowulf* (Gillam 1961: 145).

As for an etymology of the term *āglǣca*, I will strictly follow the one provided by Huffines in her study (1974). OE. *āglǣca* is composed of two stems, *āg-lǣca*, for which Huffines reconstructs Indo-European **agh*- and **legjo*. The first root, from which some Germanic reflexes could be derived – ON. *agi*, OHG. *egi* – has the basic meaning "fear, spiritual oppression". OE *lǣca*, instead, could be phonologically derived from two different roots: one related to OE *lāc* and *lācan*, and the other to OE. *lǣca*. The IE root

would then be **loig-*, meaning "jump, move, tremble", where the basic sense deals with the type of movement which usually accompanied sacrificial rites. Later, the word came to mean the sacrifice itself. On the other hand, the IE. root **leg-*, **legio-* is phonologically acceptable for OE. *lǣca*, whose basic meaning is "collect, gather together" and it is also related to Latin *legō* "gather, sort, choose". The Germanic languages, then developed the meaning "speak, tell" and narrowed it to "conjure, use sorcery". So, OE. *āglǣca* involves, as Huffines points out, two concepts: "one focusing on 'fear, terror, to make afraid' and the other on some sort of being who uses magic, sorcery, witchery. An *āglǣca* can then be defined as a being who inspires fear by magical powers" (Huffines 1974: 73-4).

The term *āglǣca* is used in reference to Grendel some eleven times and, under the light of the previously given etymology, it could be easy to detect why. The figure of Grendel, throughout the poem, is indeed the most capable of inspiring terror of all the other monsters encountered by Bēowulf – a capacity which is supported and strengthened by the poet himself thanks to his masterful ability of designing the narration of Grendel's attack at Heorot (Renoir 1962). Furthermore, he surely possesses characteristics somewhat associated with magical powers: Grendel is indeed invulnerable to swords or iron weapons (ll. 801-3); the fingers of his hand are like nails and steel (ll. 988-90); he possesses a certain magic over iron in general (ll. 721-22); associated with Grendel's invulnerability to weapons is the melting of the sword after Bēowulf cuts off his head, so his blood must have some magic in itself (Huffines 1974: 74-5).

— *deorc dēaþ-scua*° (*deorc* adj., *dēaþ-scua* m., l. 160): "dark death-shadow" (Klaeber 1950). It used as an epithet of Satan in *Christ I* (l. 257) and it is generally understood as "deadly sprite". Moreover, Klaeber notes that it was perhaps meant principally as a symbol of "darkness" (1950).

—*fēond man-cynnes*° (*fēond* m., *man-cynn* n., ll. 164, 1276): "enemy of mankind" (Klaeber 1950). This epithet, as the previous one, has been applied to Satan himself and to one of his emissaries from hell in *Juliana*, ll. 630 and 1523 (another instance of the phrase is in line 317). As Malmberg highlights, "the occurrence of *fiond mennesces cynness* as a gloss for *hostis humani generis* with reference to the devil in *The Vespasian Hymnes* (13,4) puts the diabolical connotations of this phrase beyond doubt." (1977: 242)

—(*atol) ān-gengea*° (m. l. 165; *ān-genga* l. 449): "(dire) one who goes alone, solitary one" (Klaeber 1950). The weak masculine noun *ängengea*, in poetry, is featured only in *Bēowulf*, here and in line 449 in reference to Grendel again. Such an epithet represents one of the most peculiar characteristics of the creature, who is usually referred to "the solitary one" even if, in another place of the text, Grendel is said to used to wander and dwell with his mother (ll. 1347-49a).

An interesting interpretation is the one discussed by Bammesberger (1999), as he considers the term *ängengea* not in its usual meaning of "solitary" but in a new acceptation of "attacker". He bases his thesis on the possibility that *ängengea* could "represent the agent noun corresponding to a verb *on-'gangan* 'attack': '*an-genga* could then mean 'attacker'" (Bammesberger 1999: 175). He then adds that the morphologically parallel formation *in-genga*, 'invader' - also referred to Grendel in 1776 - could be considered in order to support his own argumentation.

—*þēod-þrēa*° (f. dp. *-þrēaum*, l. 178): "distress of the people, great calamity" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon.

—*sceaða** (m. gp. *sceaðona*, l. 274): "one who does harm, enemy" (Klaeber 1950).

—*(dēogol) dǣd-hata** (m. l. 275): "(mysterious) one who shows his hatred by deeds, persecutor" (Klaeber 1950). The Bosworth-Toller dictionary proposes the term as a gloss for *facinorum osor*. Hapax legomenon.

—*þyrs** (m. ds. *-e*, l. 426): "giant, demon" (Klaeber 1950). The Oxford English Dictionary lists the word "thurse" – development of OE. þyrs – now obsolete and whose meaning is "a giant of heathen mythology; in medieval times, often, the devil, a demon; later, a goblin or hobgoblin of rustic superstition"[40]. Furthermore, an etymology is provided: "Old English *þyrs* = Old High German *duris*, *turs*, strong masculine (Middle High German *dürse*, *türse*, *turse*, weak masculine), Old Saxon *thuris* the rune þ; Old

[40] "thurse, n." *OED Online*.

Norse *þurs* < **þursaz* < Old Germanic **þurisoz*. Compare Finnish *tursa-s* sea-monster, < Old Norse." (OED Online 2014, s.v. *thurse*).

This term, relating to a physical description of Grendel, is employed in a speech by Bēowulf, thus showing that the hero is well aware of what he is up against (Storms 1972: 431).

—*dol-sceaða•* (m. as. *-sceaðan*, l. 479): "mad ravager, desperate foe" (Klaber 1950). Hapax legomenon. This is the first compound on OE. *sceaða* (also, *scaþa*, *sceaþa*) featured in the poem in reference to Grendel. The first element of such compound is OE. *dol* (adj. "foolish, heretical" Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *dol*).

— *syn-scaþa°* (m. l. 707): "malefactor, miscreant" (Klaeber 1950). Compound term on OE. *syn* (f. "misdeed, fault, crime, wrong", Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *syn*)

—*mān-scaða°* (m. ll. 712, 737): "wicked ravager, evil-doer" (Klaeber 1950). This epithet is used of Grendel twice and of his mother and the dragon, too. The first element is OE. *mān* (adj. "wicked, false" Bosowrth-Toller 1898, s.v. *mān*).

—*hearm-scaþa°* (m. l. 766): "pernicious enemy" (Klaeber 1950). This compound is a hapax legomenon, since it is featured in this place only. It has as its first element OE. *hearm* (adj. "causing harm or sorrow, grievous, injurious, evil, malicious" Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *hearm*)

—*lēod-sceaða** (m. ds. *-sceaðan*, l. 2093): "people's enemy" (Klaeber 1950); "a harmer of men, a public enemy" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *lēod-sceaða*).

—*āhlǣca* (m. gs. *āhlǣcan*, ll. 646°, 989*): a different spelling for OE. *āglǣca, ǣglǣca*, see the entry above.

— *sceadu-genga*° (m. l. 703): "walker in darkness" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon.

—*wrāð*° (adj., l. 708) : "hostile, fierce" and as a noun "foe" (Klaber 1950).

—*rinc drēamum bedǣled*° (*rinc* m., *drēamum* m. dp., *bedǣled* w. pp., ll. 720-1): "warrior deprived of mirth" (Klaeber 1950). It is worth to be noted that OE. *rinc*, used specifically in poetry, means "man" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *rinc*) even if it could be also employed in the sense of "warrior". In fact, Brodeur (1969: 264) notes that this base-word is an old Germanic *heiti* for "warrior".

In a note to his critical edition, Klaeber (1950: 55) points out that *drēamum bedǣled* is "a permanent characteristic (epitheton perpetuum) of Grendel, like *wonsǣlī* 105, *fēasceaft* 973, *earmsceapen* 1351, *synnum geswenced* 975."

Greenfield (1955: 205), on his turn, affirms: "by use of the formula *dréame(-um) bedæled* in *Bwf* 721a and 1275a, twice applied to Grendel, the *Béowulf* poet is able to suggest Grendel's kinship with all other exiles, especially with the devils, indicating the monster's deprivation of both human joys and eternal blessedness."

Another interpretation is given by Storms (1972: 435): "*drēamum bedǣled* refers to God's condemnation of Cain and his descendants but it may also mean here that he finds no joy in fight, which was an honourable occupation to a Germanic warrior [...]; Grendel, however, does not give a fair chance in an honourable fight."

—*fyrena hyrde*° (*fyrena* f. gp., *hyrde* m., l. 750): "guardian of crimes" where OE. *fyren* means "crime, sin, wicked deed" and OE. *hyrde, hirde* "guardian, keeper" (Klaeber 1950). Such epithet illustrates the sinful nature of Grendel himself.

— *eoten*° (m. l. 761): "giant" (Klaeber 1950), "giant, monster, Grendel" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *eoten*). Grendel is the *eoten* par excellence since this term has survived in Old English only in reference to him. The Oxford English Dictionary exhibits the entry "eten, ettin"[41] (Obs. "a giant") which is supposed to be the development of OE. *eoten, eten*, cognate to ON. *iǫtunn* < Old Germanic **ituno-z*.

[41] "† ˈeten | ˈettin, n." *OED Online*.

—*ren-weard*° (m. np. *-as*, l. 770): "guardian of the house" (Klaeber 1950). The word appears to have been coined by the *Bēowulf*-poet since it is attested only in this place signifying Grendel and Bēowulf jointly.

—*Godes and-saca* (*Godes andsacan* m. as., l. 786°; l. 1682*): "God's enemy" (Klaeber 1950). OE. *andsaca* is found in poetry only and, according to Malmberg, there are ten occurrences of the periphrasis *Godes a.* in Old English poetry, six of which are directly referred to Lucifer and the devils with him; "it is thus fairly clear that *godes andsaca* is a well-established term for the devil and that when it is used of Grendel, it is meant to convey associations connected with Satan in Old English Christian poetry." (1977: 242)

—*helle hæft*° (adj. asm. *hæfton*, l. 788): "hell's captive" (Klaeber 1950). This periphrasis belongs to the same semantic field as the previous one, since the devil's captivity in hell is a well-known topos in Old English Christian poetry, where it also used of the Fallen Angels in *Christ and Satan* (l. 1629). The Latin equivalent is *captivus inferni*.

—*cwealm-cuma*° (m. as. *-cuman* l. 792): "murderous visitor" (Klaeber 1950), "a deadly guest" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *cwealm-cuma*). Hapax legomenon. The first element of the compound is OE. *cwealm*, m. "death, destruction, slaughter, murder" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *cwealm*), while the second one is OE. *cuma*, m. "a comer, guest, stranger" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *cuma*).

—*ellor-gāst*° (m. l. 807): "alien spirit" (Klaeber 1950); "a spirit living or going elsewhere, a departing spirit" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *ellor-gāst*). The first element of the compound is the OE. adv. *ellor*, which means "elsewhere" and gives an indication of the lonely and wandering nature of Grendel. See also *se ellengæst* (l. 86).

—*sē þe fela ǣror / mōdes myrðe manna cynne, / fyrene gefremede*° (ll. 809b-811a): "he who has already caused many afflictions, many crimes to mankind's mind".

— *hilde-dēor*° (adj. l. 834): "brave in battle" (Klaeber 1950). Although this adjective, here used substantively, is always applied to a human referent – as happened in *Bēowulf* when in lines 1646, 1816 and 2813 is referred indisputably to Bēowulf himself – I would like to mention the following intriguing suggestion exposed by Johansen (1982) regarding an unusual interpretation of *hilde-deor* in reference to Grendel. He bases his assumption on an analysis of lines 834-6, which refers to the placing of Grendel's arm *under gēapne hrōf* "under the vaulting roof" after having been torn from his shoulder, by affirming that if *hilde-deor* would be referred to Grendel this passage and another one in 850b-2a would form an attractive structural envelope. In fact,

> "in line 834 Grendel *hond alegde* 'laid (down) his hand'; in 851b he *feorh aledge* 'laid (down) his life'. In line 835a *earm on eaxle* 'arm and shoulder' stand in apposition to *hond*, naming more specifically what was laid down by Grendel. *Hæþene sawle* 'heathen soul' is in similar position and performs a similar function with respect to *feorh* in line 852a. The location of both losses is specified in each passage: Grendel loses his arm *under geapne hrof* 'under the vaulting roof' (836b), and his life *in fen-freoðo* 'in (his) marshland fastness' (851a)". (1982: 195)

Then, Johansen lists a series of places where dictions normally applied to humans are instead refer to Grendel, as a clear exposition of an ironic pattern in which *hilde-deor* is said to fit perfectly. Furthermore, he points out that "in the most literal of sense Grendel is indeed a 'beast' (*deor*) engaged in 'battle' (*hilde*). The sharp contrast between this literal truth and the gross inapplicability of the compound's usual meaning, 'brave in battle', provides the crux of the irony" (Johansen 1982: 197).

— *tīr-lēas*° (adj. l. 843): "inglorious, vanquished" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. The compound is formed on OE. *tīr* m., "glory, honour" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *tīr*) as its first element and on OE. *lēas* adj., "void of, without" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *lēas*) as its second one.

—*hæþen sāwol*° (adj. asf. *hæþene*, f. as. *sāwle*, l. 852): "heathen soul" (Klaeber 1950). Grendel is defined as *hæþen* in l. 986, as well. It is remarkable that we are now acknowledged that even Grendel possesses a soul, which is then going to be punished for his sins.

—*feorh-genīðla** (m. ds. *-genīðlan*, l. 969): "life-enemy, deadly foe". The term is subsequently used of Grendel's mother (l. 1540) and the dragon, in a slightly different spelling *ferhðgenīðla* (l. 2881), and also in line 2933 where refers to the Geats survived after the battle against the Scylfingas.

—*fēa-sceaft guma** (*fēa-sceaft* adj., *guma* m., l. 973): "destitute, poor, wretched", "man" (Klaeber 1950). Such expression exhibits another note of sympathy for Grendel, as the previous *wonsæli wer* does. OE. *guma* is the term used in poetry to signify "man" – for instance, it is also attested in *Daniel* (ll. 237, 260), *Genesis* (ll. 1863, 2793) and *Christ II* (ll. 821, 1654) –, so Grendel is again referred to as if he were a man. As for its etymology, the term is thought to derive from Proto-Germanic **gumô*. Germanic cognates include OHG. *goma*, ON. g*umi*, Goth. *guma*; the Indo-European root is also the source of Latin *homo*. In Modern English its descendent is 'groom', short form for 'bridegroom'.

—*grom-heort guma** (*grom-heort* adj., *guma* m., l. 1682): "hostile-hearted man" (Klaeber 1950). The adjective *gromheort* is a hapax legomenon.

—*lāð-getēona** (m. l. 974): "loathly spoiler, evil-doer" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon; compound of *lāð*, 'enemy', variously employed in the poem in reference to every kind of enemies. The term is also used in 559, when Bēowulf narrates of his contest with Breca, to indicate the sea-fishes (*mere-fixas*) which attacked the hero.

— *hilde-rinc** (m. l. 986): "warrior" (Klaeber 1950). Another term which is usually used in poetry of human referents. It is formed on OE. *hild* f., "war, battle" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *hild*), a poetical term too, and OE. *rinc* m., "man" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *rinc*), which is already attested in *Bēowulf* in reference to Grendel in l. 720.

— *se āglæca / fyren-dædum fāg°* (ll. 1000-1): "the demon guilty of crimes" (Klaeber 1950). Klaeber here considers *fāg* with the meaning of "outlawed, guilty" instead of the other one of "variegated, decorated" which is usually adopted in this place.

—*heoro-wearh*° (m. l. 1267): "accursed foe, savage outcast" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon.

—*helle-gāst*° (m. l. 1274): "a spirit of hell, an infernal spirit" (Bosworth-Toller 1921, s.v. *helle-gāst*). See *se ellengæst* above (l. 86).

— *æl-wiht*° (f. gp. *-a*, l. 1500): "alien creature, monster" (Klaeber 1950). According to Klaeber this term is a hapax legomenon while in the Bosworth-Toller dictionary is recorded as *ælwihta* (pl.) with double meanings: "strange creatures, monsters", found only in *Bēowulf*; "all created things", attested only in *The legend of St. Andrew* (l. 118). As for the second element of the compound, OE. *wiht* (f.) presents several meanings, like: "a wight, creature, being" or "aught, anything" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *wiht*).

—*hūses hyrde** (*hūs* n., m. ap. *hyrdas*, l. 1666): "guardian of the house" (Klaeber 1950). Bēowulf uses this periphrasis to signify Grendel and his mother jointly.

—*eald-gewinna*• (m. l. 1776): "old adversary" (Klaeber 1950). Regarding this compound Malmberg (1977: 242) notes that it "does not occur elsewhere in Old English poetry but the related *ealdfeond* is common particularly with reference to the devil. It is reasonable to assume both go back to Latin *hostis antiquus*, which is a standard term applied to the devil in patristic literature".

—*in-genga mīn*• (*in-genga* m., l. 1776): "invader" (Klaeber 1950), "an aggressor, invader" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *in-genga*), "my aggressor". Hapax legomenon used in a speech by King Hrōþgār, as the previous one.

— *wæl-gæst*• (m. as. l. 1995): "murderous sprite" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon employed in a speech by Hygelāc. See the above-mentioned *se ellen-gæst* (l. 86) entry for more information.

—*bona blōdig-tōð** (*bona* m., *blōdig-tōð* adj., l. 2086): m. “slayer, murderer”, adj. “with bloody teeth” (Klaeber 1950), “bloody-toothed, cruel” (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *blōdig-tōð*), “the bloody-toothed murderer”. The adjective *blōdig-tōð* is a hapax legomenon.

— *dīor dǣd-fruma** (*dīor* adj., *dǣd-fruma* m., l. 2090): “brave, bold, fierce”, “doer of (evil) deeds” (Klaeber 1950), “a deed-doer, perpetrator, labourer” (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *dǣd-fruma*), “the dire perpetrator”.

2.I. Grendel: a description

Now, I would like to epitomise all the entries listed above in order to give an overall impression of the semantic fields in which each term could be listed. In order to do so, I selected some semantic categories that seem suitable to me, like:

- Exile: some seven epithets and one periphrasis are likely to have given the audience in the past and give the reader nowadays a portrait of the figure of Grendel, as he were an exiled men, thus living away from the hall where his own lord dwells and wandering around in misery;
- Demonic (hellish) referent: a large number of terms employed in the poem are usually referred to demons, or even Satan himself, in several other Old English texts, so they give a demonic hue to Grendel too;
- Wicked creature: akin to the previous category, this one presents the largest number of occurrences featuring all of these epithets (plus a periphrasis) which describe Grendel as evil but in a supernatural way;
- Enmity: some of the terms listed here are usually employed in order to signify human enemies, while the major parts of them are hapax legomena, formed on OE. *sceaða*;
- Guardian: even if this category is represented by only one epithet, it is important in reference to Grendel’s mother, of whom a couple of epithets belonging to the same semantic field are used;

- Ironic terms: four of the terms previously discussed feature an ironic undertone beyond their main meanings.

Exile	Demonic (hellish) referent	Wicked creature	Enmity	Guardian	Ironic terms
(mǣre) mearcstapa; wonsǣli wer; (atol) ǣngengea; rinc drēamum bedǣled; ellor-gāst; fēasceaft guma; heoro-wearh; grom-heort guma	*fēond on hell; deorc dēaþ-scua; sceadu-genga; Godes andsaca; helle hæft; hǣþen sāwol; helle gāst*	*se ellen-gæst; wiht un-hǣlo; ǣglǣca (*and *āhlǣca); (dēogol) dǣdhata; þyrs; syn-scaþa; mān-scaða; fyrena hyrde; eoten; cwealm-cuma; ellor-gāst; sē þe fela ǣror / mōdes myrðe manna cynne, /*	*lað; fēond; fēond man-cynnes; sceaða; þēod-þrēa; dol-sceaða; mān-scaða; hearm-scaþa; wrāð; tīrlēas; feorh-genīðla; lāð-getēona; eald-gewinna; ingenga mīn; lēod-sceaða*	*hūses hyrde*	*heal-ðegn; ren-weard; hilde-dēor; hilde-rinc*

		fyrene gefremede; lāð-getēona; se āglæca / fyrendædum fāg; æl-wiht; wæl-gæst; bona blōdig-tōð; dīor dæd-fruma			

Another table is now provided, where I collected all the epithets and periphrases conveniently divided on the basis of their place in the texts: namely, in authorial narration; in Bēowulf's speeches and in Hrōþgār's ones (plus one place that features a term employed by Hygelāc).

Author (°)	Bēowulf (*)	Hrōþgār or Hygelāc (•)
se ellen-gæst; *fēond on helle;* *(mære) mearcstapa;* *wonsæli wer;* *wiht un-hælo;* *lað;* *heal-ðegn;*	*lað;* *fēond;* *sceaða;* *(dēogol) dæd-hata;* *þyrs;* *lēod-sceaða:* *āhlæca;*	*lað;* *dol-sceaða;* *eald-gewinna;* *in-genga mīn;* *wæl-gæst (Hyg)*

fēond; *āglæca, æglæca:* *deorc dēaþ-scua;* *fēond man-cynnes;* (*atol) ān-gengea;* *þēod-þrēa;* *syn-scaþa;* *mān-scaða;* *hearm-scaþa;* *āhlæca;* *sceadu-genga;* *wrāð;* *rinc drēamum bedæled;* *fyrena hyrde;* *eoten;* *ren-weard;* *Godes and-saca;* *helle hæft;* *cwealm-cuma;* *ellor-gāst;* *sē þe fela æror / mōdes* *myrðe manna cynne, /* *fyrene gefremede;* *hilde-dēor;* *tīr-lēas;* *hæþen sāwol;* *se āglæca / fyren-dædum* *fāg;* *heoro-wearh;* *helle-gāst;* *æl-wiht*	*Godes and-saca;* *feorh-genīðla;* *fēa-sceaft guma;* *grom-heort guma;* *lāð-getēona;* *hilde-rinc;* *hūses hyrde;* *bona blōdig-tōð;* *dīor dæd-fruma*	

As it was expected, the "Author" column presents the major part of the epithets and periphrases used of Grendel throughout the poem. The range of these tokens is rather extended among the categories analysed beforehand, in fact every category but the "Guardian" one is represented with at least one entry.

The Bēowulf column obviously presents fewer terms than the previous one and they are mostly concerned with the "Enmity" category since the main role of Grendel is being enemy to the hero. It might be noted that both the epithets that feature OE. *guma* are employed by Bēowulf, a peculiarity that could stress an attempt to sympathise with the creature.

All of these four terms attributed to Hrōþgār belong to the "Enmity" category, as expected since Grendel is to the King of the Scyldings an enemy to the well-being of his country. Finally, the epithets used in a speech by Hygelāc is, without any surprise, quite a common one in reference to a wicked creature as Grendel.

From the analysis conducted so far, it results clear enough that the figure of Grendel presents some interesting – and sometimes ambiguous – characteristics which open to different ways of interpreting Grendel in his totality. If the majority of the scholars has considered – and still persists to consider – him exclusively as a negative creature, there are some exceptions that have seen him in a different light though. Carlson (1967: 362), for instance, disregarding that Grendel is said to descend from Cain, choses to depend only on the Danes for an account of his origin. In fact, he explains that

> the land-dwellers did not know of his father (line 1355), but they had seen Grendel and his mother walking in the nearby wastelands often enough to give him his name. He was surely a large man, but must not have been a real threat to the land-dwellers. The fact that he recognized Heorot as the seat of power of the Danes, not some poor peasant's hut, may be indicative of Grendel's intelligence. His enormous strength, wrestling ability, and bloody-thirsty cannibalism are contrasted with his very real pain and anguish on having his arm wrenched off by Bēowulf and his agonized return to his cave, where he died (Carlson 1967: 362).

Chapman, on his turn, proposes a sympathetic reading of Grendel on the basis that the poet himself seems to express sympathy for him, using several expressions such as *wonsæli wer* (l. 105), 'unhappy man'; *dreamum bedǣled* (l. 721), 'deprived of joy'; *feasceaft guma* (l. 973), 'destitute man'; *synnum geswenced* (l. 975), 'sin-afflicted'; *earm-sceaþen* (l. 1351), 'deformed' (1956: 334). Then, he adds another reason for sympathising

with such a figure, namely the very fact that the poet in having made of Grendel a "diabolic agent and [...] a descendant of Cain", states also that he "was damned at birth", which results in an "eternal damnation because of his nature, not of his will" (Chapman 1956: 336). Furthermore, also Chapman suggests that something akin to a human being is innate of Grendel as well, since the poet, not having any useful tradition to guide him in the creation of a suitable opponent for an ethical hero, "in some measure assimilated Grendel to a human adversary" (Chapman 1956: 335).

3. Grendel's mother

Before line 1257b we are not aware that Grendel is not the only enemy Bēowulf had engaged battle with and, above all, that Grendel himself is not really *ān-gengea* (l. 165), 'a solitary' at all. In fact, suddenly in the narration, Grendel's mother is called to make her appearance in order to avenge her son's defeat. Her way to attack Heorot and its inhabitants is thus the same as Grendel's: at night, while everyone is asleep, grasping at one of the warrior in the attempt to run away to secure her own life. Between mother's and son's behaviour there is a difference though, "while Grendel is a ruthless, unprovoked aggressor, his mother [...] acts in accordance with the standard Germanic code of blood-revenge" (Puhvel 1969: 82-3).

As for her appearance, nothing is said in the poem, so we are tempted to picture her in our mind as we have previously done with Grendel: an ogress but with female attributes – *Đǣra ōðer wæs, / þæs þe hīe gewislīcost gewitan meahton, / idese onlīcen* (ll. 1349b-50a)[42]. Such womanly feature is affirmed in lines from 1282 to 1285 – *Wæs se gryre lǣssa / efne swā micle, swā bið mægþa cræft / wīg-gryre wīfes, be wǣpned-men / þonne heoru bunden*[43]– where her strength is then put in comparison with that of men's. With regards to these lines, Klaeber notes: "the inserted remark that Grendel's mother is less dangerous than Grendel in as much as she is a woman [...] is evidently to be explained as an endeavour to discredit the unbiblical notion of a woman's superiority" (1950: 181, note).

[42] "One of these things, / as far as anyone can ever discern, /looks like a woman" (Heaney 1999: 45).
[43] "Her onslaught was less / only by as much as an amazon warrior's / strength is less than an armed man's [...]" (Heaney 1999: 43).

As I have pointed out in the previous paragraph, "°" indicates an authorial term, "*" a term uttered by Bēowulf and, finally, "•" those epithets employed by Hrōþgār.

—*wrecend*° (m. l. 1256): "avenger" (Klaeber 1950). This is the first term used of Grendel's mother that clearly denotes her role in the poem: the one of who wants to avenge a blood-relative, a behaviour that is completely in accordance with the Germanic code, as it has been already stated beforehand.

—*Grendles mōdor* (f. l. 1258°; *Grendeles mōdor*, ll. 2118*, 2139*): "Grendel's mother" (Klaeber 1950).

—*āglǣc-wīf*° (l. 1259): "wretch, or monster, of a woman" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. The term is a peculiar compound on OE. *āglǣca, ǣglǣca* – discussed previously in reference to Grendel (l. 159) – and on OE. *wīf* n., "woman, a female person, a being in the form of a woman, a married woman" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *wīf*), which is the most common term used to indicate a female person in Old English. This noun is cognate with O. Sax and O. Frs. *wīf*, OHG. *wīp*, ON. *vīf*; it then originates ME. *Wyf* and Mod.E. *wife*. Due to such a juxtaposition of these two terms the compound may be interpreted as an oxymoron.

—*wæl-gǣst*• (m. l. 1331): "murderous sprite" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. See *se ellen-gæst* (l. 86) discussed above in the paragraph about Grendel.

—*mān-scaða*• (m. l. 1339): "wicked ravager, evil-doer" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. This epithets is also used of Grendel in ll. 712, 737. See the entry above for further references both on this term and on other compounds on OE. *sceaþa*.

—*ellor-gǣst*• (m. ap. *-gǣstas* l. 1349): "alien spirit" (Klaeber 1950). For further information see the entries *se ellengæst* (l. 86) and *ellor-gǣst* (l. 807) discussed above in reference to Grendel.

—*ides*• (gs. *idese*, l. 1351): "†woman, lady" (Klaeber 1950). In the Bosworth-Toller dictionary is attested that OE. *ides* "is a word little used except in poetry, and it is supposed by Grimm to have been applied, in the earliest times, like the Greek *νύμφη*, to superhuman beings, occupying a position between goddesses and mere women" (1898: 586).

Cronan (2003) points out that *ides*, in poetry, "can be used of any woman, although it usually refers to a noble woman; in glosses it means 'maiden, virgin'. […] the original meaning of *ides* does not appear to have been 'maiden, virgin'. Its etymology is obscure, but both its cognates, OS *idis* and OHG *itis*, mean 'high-ranking woman, lady'. It thus seems probable that 'maiden, virgin' is either a narrowing, or a transfer" (Cronan 2003: 403).

—*sinnigne secg*• (l. 1379): adj. *sinnig* "sinful", n. "man" (Klaber 1950). Klaeber, in the note regarding line 1379, points out that *fela-sinnigne secg*, as it is presented in other editions, is incompatible with the regular alliterative practice.

It is worth to be noted that the noun *secg* is usually used, in poetry, in reference to male human referents while here is used of Grendel's mother, who has been previously defined as *wīf*, 'woman'. A cognate to OE. *secg* could be ON. *seggr*, as suggested by Klaeber, and it could also be related to Latin *socius*.

—*Grendles māge** (wk.f *māgan* ll. 1391): "kinswoman (mother)" (Klaeber 1950), "Grendel's mother".

—*brim-wylf*° (ll. 1506, 1599): "she-wolf of the sea or lake" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. In l. 1506 the term originally applied to Grendel's mother is *brimwyl*, later emended to *brimwylf* presumably because of the actual occurrence of *brimwylf* featured in line 1599; furthermore, "since the account of Bēowulf struggle with Grendel's mother includes, in line 1519, the descriptive noun *mere-wīf*, 'sea woman', it is possible that the scribe should have written *brimwīf*, 'ocean-woman'" (Carlson 1967: 358-9).

—*grund-wyrgen*° (as *-wyrgenne*, l. 1518): "accursed (female) monster of the deep" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. The first element of this compound is OE.

grund m., "ground, bottom, a depth, sea, abyss" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *grund*) while OE. *wyrgen* seems to be attested only in this term, that the Bosworth-Toller dictionary translates as "a wolf of the deep [Grendel's mother]" (1898: 492).

— *mere-wīf*° (l. 1519): "mere-woman, water-witch" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. Compound formed on OE. *mere* f., whose meaning "sea" appears only in poetry, while in prose the word means "lake, pond, pool", especially in charters (Cronan 2003: 402). The second element, OE. *wīf*, is discussed in reference to the entry OE. *āglǣc-wīf* (l. 1259).

—*feorh-genīðla*° (as. l. 1540): "life-enemy, deadly-foe" (Klaeber 1950). Already discussed in reference to Grendel, l. 969.

—*hūses hyrde** (ap. *hyrdas*, l. 1666): "guardian of the house" (Klaeber 1950). It is referred to Grendel's mother and her son jointly.

— *grund-hyrde** (l. 2136): "guardian of the deep" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon.

— *wīf unhyre** (l. 2120): n. "woman, lady", adj. "awful, frightful, monstruos" (Klaeber 1950).

3.I. Grendel's mother: a description

To sum up, it may be useful to gather together the epithets and put them in a table where some semantic categories have been highlighted.

- Wicked creature: this category is featured with those epithets that describe Grendel's mother as evil, with a supernatural hue, but without any references to her sex;
- Female (human) referent: the terms categorised here are characterised by the fact that they are usually employed to signify female human persons;

- Female (supernatural) referent: this category is the counterpart of the previous one, since its epithets refer to a monstrous being but with a stress on her female sex;
- Enmity: like the same category presented in the previous table in reference to Grendel, two of the terms listed are strictly used in reference to enemies of any sorts; OE. *wrecend*, even if it means "avenger" could be related to the idea of "enmity" in any case;
- Guardian: again, another category in common with Grendel. The two epithets featured refer to Grendel's mother being a guardian, the first one in a more concrete way, while the second one presents a metaphoric hue, though Grendel's mother dwells at the bottom of a mere.

Wicked creature	Female (human) referent	Female (monstruous) referent	Enmity	Guardian
wæl-gǣst; ellorgǣst; mānscaða; sinnigne secg	*Grendeles mōdor; ides*; *Grendles māge*	*āglǣcwīf*; *brimwylf*; *grundwyrgen*; *merewīf*; *wīf unhyre*	*wrecend*; *mānscaða*; *feorhgenīðla*	*hūses hyrde*; *grundhyrde*

Then follows the table with the assignments of the epithets to the author or Bēowulf and Hrōþgār:

Author (°)	Bēowulf (*)	Hrōþgār (•)
wrecend;	*Grendles mōdor;*	*wæl-gǣst;*

Grendles mōdor; *āglǣc-wīf;* *brim-wylf;* *grund-wyrgen;* *mere-wīf;* *feorh-genīðla*	*Grendles māge;* *hūses hyrde;* *wīf unhyre;* *grund-hyrde*	*mān-scaða;* *ellor-gǣst;* *ides;* *sinnigne secg*

As we can see from the table above, the author is entitled to characterise Grendel's mother, making the audience aware of her peculiarities of being a creature strictly linked to a marine environment and, above all, of being Grendel's mother and an avenger of him.

Bēowulf refers to her twice as mother to Grendel – thus by stressing her relationship to Grendel himself – then he employs the only two terms listed in the "Guardian" category. Among the epithets used by Hrōþgār the most peculiar is OE. *ides* indeed since in all the other places throughout the poem it is used of noble ladies, as its primary meaning suggests.

From the analysis of the epithets and periphrases used of Grendel's mother in the poem, it results that the majority of them shows a strong female connotation in the use of terms like *ides* (l. 1351) and *wīf* (ll. 1259, 1506, 1519, 1599, 2120, alone and in compounds); moreover, a large number of epithets relate to an aquatic environment since the abode of Grendel and his mother, as it is described in lines from 1357b to 1374a, is akin to a cave under the surface of the mere. Finally, it may be useful to remember that in Old Germanic literatures the outlaw is usually referred to as *wulf*, 'wolf', using this term metaphorically. By stating so, it could be placed a parallel between Grendel and his mother, on the basis of Grendel's being considered as an exiled creature – as it has been previously discussed – and such an employing of a term like *brimwylf* in reference to his mother, that implies a recollection of the notion just stated, namely the Germanic habit of naming *wulf* the outlaw, who is basically an exile. The importance of this parallel could be detected in the fact that, unlike Grendel, his mother is never referred to with terms implying an exiled condition, if we exclude the above-mentioned *brimwylf* with its

limitations in meaning, but we are nevertheless aware that she and Grendel share this exiled condition in living secluded from the society, constituted by the hall in Heorot and his dwellers.

Finally, Grendel's mother constitutes a problem indeed in the structure of the poem but also in its way of representing the woman as the ideal "peace-maker" by means of her being the one who passes the cup among members of hall festivities of peace and joy after battle, thus strengthening the societal and familial bonds between lord and retainers. As far as the structure of the poem is concerned, if it is regarded as having two parts then Grendel's mother episode "lengthens the "half" focusing on his [Bēowulf's] youth to two-thirds of the poem" (Chance 1990: 248); if the poem is regarded as three-part in structure, "the brevity of her episode again mars the structural balance: her section, roughly 500 lines (1251-1784), is not as long as Grendel's, roughly 1100-1200 lines (86-1250), or the dragon's, 1000 lines (2200-3182)." (Chance 1990: 248). As for Grendel's mother being in comparison with the other female figures throughout the poem, it could be pointed out that:

> Indeed, three women characters appear outside the middle section to convey dialectically the idea that woman cannot ensure peace in this world. First, Wealhtheow, unlike other female figures, appears in the first (or Grendel) section of the poem to pour mead after Grendel's challenge has been answered by the hero. This first entrance symbolizes the ideal role of Germanic woman as a personification of peace, as we have seen. In antithesis, Beowulf's account of the fall of the *wīf unhyre* 'monstrous woman' appropriately ends the poem's second (Grendel's Mother) section which has centered on this role: the personification of discord, the antitype of the feminine ideal, has been destroyed. But in the poem's third section a synthesis emerges. The nameless and unidentified Geat woman who appears, like the other female characters, after a battle – this one between Beowulf and the dragon – mourns at the pyre. That is, the efforts of the peacemaker, while valuable in worldly and social terms, ultimately must fail because of the nature of this world. (Chance 1990: 256-7)

4. The dragon

The figure of the dragon is one of the most ordinary to be featured in medieval literature and the *Bēowulf* poem is no exception in presenting one. The dragon is thus the third and last adversary Bēowulf has to fight with, the sequence relating to such a fight is the longest in poem running from line 2208 – where the dragon is first said to be at guard of a hoard – to line 2709a, when the creature is finally defeated and the hero mortally wounded, though the dragon itself is again referred to, here and there, until the end of the poem.

Lingering on a necessarily long dissertation about the possible sources and parallels of the dragon episode would be otiose if not slightly out of topic indeed. Then we may focus, as we have done before, on a general description of the dragon itself before delivering an in-depth analysis of the epithets and periphrases used of it. The first characteristic that is worth to be mentioned is that the dragon is conceived and hence described by the poet as a monster of serpentine shape, as it is pointed out by the employment of terms like OE. *wyrm*, 'worm, serpent' (extended to signify also 'dragon') and OE. *draca*, 'dragon'. Following a compelling suggestion by Rauer (2000), as she identifies a hierarchy in the dragon's attributes stressing the attention on the fact that the poet apparently uses four main attributes which recur throughout the episode. These four traits are, in order of prominence: "imagery of fire, heat and burning, which occurs in almost every reference to the dragon"; "imagery relating to the hoarding and guarding of treasure and gold" – a characteristic peculiar to Scandinavian dragons which guard treasure in funeral mounds; "imagery relating to the dragon's nocturnal nature. The *Bēowulf*-poet seems to imply not only that the dragon is habitually active during the night at dusk and dawn, but also (and more remarkably) that it is normally *asleep during the day*"; finally, "imagery relating to an interest in searching and finding, general inquisitiveness" (Rauer 2000: 33-4).
Again, after each term a symbol is used: "°" indicates these epithets used in an authorial way, "*" the ones employed by Bēowulf and "•" the terms used in different speeches by Wīglāf.

—*wyrm-hord*° (n. l. 2221): "dragon's hoard" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. This noun is not used of the dragon, since it indicates the hoard itself, but it is still a compound on OE. *wyrm* – one of the most common word used to signify the dragon in *Bēowulf* together with OE. *draca*, as it has been stated before – even if its proper meaning is "a reptile, serpent" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *wyrm*).

—*ūht-sceaða*° (m., l. 2271): "depredator at (dawn) night" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. Such term is the first of a series of compound formed on OE. *sceaða*, 'enemy', which in the first part of the poem was used of Grendel, as we have previously seen.

The dragon is said to manifest itself only at night - OE. *ūht* denotes "the time just before daybreak" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *ūht*) - as Grendel did before it.

— *þēod-sceaða*° (m., ll. 2278, 2688): "people's foe or spoiler" (Klaeber 1950), "a criminal against the community, a spoiler of the community, a great criminal or spoiler" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *þēod-sceaða*).

— *gūð-sceaða*° (m., l. 2318): "enemy, destroyer" (Klaeber 1950); "one who harms by warlike attack" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *gūð-sceaða*). Hapax legomenon. The first element of the compound is OE. *gūð*, f., a poetical word used to signify "war, battle, fight" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *gūð*).

—*mān-sceaða** (m. l. 2514): "wicked ravager, evil-doer" (Klaeber 1950). Also used of Grendel (ll. 712, 737) and his mother (l. 1339).

— *attor-sceaða*° (m. gs. *-sceaðan*, l. 2839): "venomous foe" (Klaeber 1950); "a poisonous destroyer, a venomous dragon, serpent" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *attor-sceaða*).

—*nīð-draca*° (m., l. 2273): "hostile or malicious dragon" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. The term is a compound on OE. *nīð* m., "envy, hatred, enmity, strife, war, evil, wickedness, malice" and on one of the common noun used of the dragon, OE. *draca*.

— *līg-draca*° (m. l. 2333; *lēg-*, l. 3040): "fire-dragon" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon.

— *hord-weard*° (m., ll. 2293, 2302, 2554, 2593): "guardian of the treasure" (Klaeber 1950). This epithet, amply used of the dragon, in *Bēowulf* is also used in reference to the Danish King in lines 1047 and 1852, *hordweard hæleþa*.

— *gold-weard*• (l. 3081): "guardian of gold" (Klaber 1950). Hapax legomenon.

—*beorges hyrde*° (*beorges* m. gs., *hyrde* m., l. 2304): "guardian of the barrow" (Klaeber 1950). In 2524 another periphrasis with the same meaning is used, *beorges weard*.

—*frætwa hyrde*° (*frætwa* pl. f. gp., *hyrde* m., l. 3133): "guardian of precious things" (Klaeber 1950).

—*gæst*° (m., l. 2312): "ghost, spirit, sprite, demon" (Klaeber 1950). Klaeber hesitates about considering this one as an occurrence of the above-mentioned term or of OE. *gist*, 'stranger, visitor'.

—*inwit-gæst*° (m., or *-gǣst*?, l. 2670) and *nið-gæst*° (m., or *-gǣst*?, l. 2699): "malicious (stranger) or foe" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomena.

—*lyft-floga*° (m. l. 2315): "air-flier" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon.

—*wīd-floga*° (m. as. *-flogan*, l. 2346, l. 2830): "far-flier" (Klaeber 1950); "a wide-flier, one that takes wide flights" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *wīd-floga*). Hapax legomenon.

—*gūð-floga** (m. as. *-flogan*, l. 2528): "war-flier" (Klaeber 1950); "one that flies to battle, a dragon" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *gūð-floga*). Hapax legomenon.

—*eorð-draca*° (m., ll. 2712, 2825): "earth-dragon" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. Such specification is made to distinguish between this type of dragon and the marine ones (*sǣdracan*, l. 1426) Bēowulf fight against when he was young.

—*ūht-floga*° (m. gs. *-flogan*, l. 2760): "(dawn- or) night-flier". Hapax legomenon.

— *weard unhīore*° (*weard* m., *unhīore* adj., l. 2413): "monstrous guardian" (Klaeber 1950).

—*gryre-giest*° (m. ds. *-e*, l. 2560): "dreadful stranger" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon.

—*gryre-fāh*° (adj. asm. *-ne*, l. 2576; l. 3041): "terrible in its variegated coloring" (Klaber 1950). Hapax legomenon.

— *āglæca*° (m. np. *āglæcean*, l. 2592): "wretch, monster, demon, fiend" and "warrior, hero" (Klaeber 1950). This term is used of Bēowulf and the dragon jointly. For an in-depth analysis of the word see the entry above (l. 159), when in reference to Grendel.

—*ferhð-genīðla*• (m. as. *-genīðlan*, l. 2881): "deadly foe" (Klaeber 1950). Hapax legomenon. Previously used of both Grendel (l. 969) and his mother (l. 1540) but in a different spelling, *feorh-genīðla*.

4.I. The dragon: a description

In order to summarise the above-mentioned epithets and periphrases another table, divided in the following categories, will follow:

- Serpentine form: the epithets listed here are all compounds on OE. *draca*, which means "dragon" but also "serpent". Furthermore, the dragon itself is usually described like a huge serpent but with wings.
- Flying creature: since having wings is a peculiar feature of the *Bēowulf* dragon, in the text four terms are featured, formed on OE. *floga*, a word which indicates "one who flies" (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *floga*).
- Enmity: like Grendel and his mother before it, also the dragon is referred to with epithets that characterise it as an enemy; they are all compounds on OE. *sceaða* but the last one.

- Wicked creature: numerous terms are employed to describe the dragon as an evil, wicked creature, capable only of harming and destroying.
- Guardian: another peculiarity of this dragon, but also of dragons in general, is its being guardian of a hoard.

Serpentine form	Flying creature	Enmity	Wicked creature	Guardian
nīð-draca; līg-draca; eorð-draca	*lyft-floga; wīd-floga; gūð-floga; ūht-floga*	*ūht-sceaða; þēod-sceaða; gūð-sceaða; gūðfloga; mān-sceaða; attor-sceaða; ferhð-genīðla*	*nīð-draca; gæst; mān-sceaða; gryre-giest; gryre-fāh; āglæca; inwit-gæst; nið-gæst*	*hord-weard; beorges hyrde; weard unhīore; gold-weard; frætwa hyrde*

As for Grendel and his mother, a table where all the epithets used of the dragon are collected and divided according to whom employed them in the poem.

Author (°)	Bēowulf (*)	Wīglāf (•)
wyrm-hord; ūht-sceaða; þēod-sceaða; gūð-sceaða; attor-sceaða; nīð-draca; līg-draca;	*mān-sceaða; gūð-floga*	*gold-weard; ferhð-genīðla*

hord-weard; *beorges hyrde;* *frætwa hyrde;* *gæst;* *inwit-gæst;* *nið-gæst;* *lyft-floga;* *wīd-floga;* *eorð-draca;* *ūht-floga;* *weard unhīore;* *gryre-giest;* *gryre-fāh;* *āglæca*		

Since the last part of the *Bēowulf* poem is primarily a narrative one with few speeches featured, it is not surprising at all that the major part of the epithets are listed in the "Author" column. These epithets represent every category highlighted in the table above, in fact it is customary that the author provides his audience/readers with all the information related to a single character.

It is surely significative that Bēowulf employs OE. *mān-sceaða* and OE. *gūð-floga* since both of them are related to the idea of enmity, the first one also presents a wicked hue while *gūð-floga* has in itself a reference to the dragon being a flying creature.

Finally, the two epithets used by Wīglāf are concerned with the most peculiar characteristic of the dragon – its being at guard of a hoard – and the creature perceived as enemy.

As far as the appearance of the dragon is concerned, after having analysed several epithets used of it an in-depth description of such a creature is now possible. First of all, we are told that the dragon "is over fifty feet long (3042)"[44], it "is armed with flame (2308

[44] "Sē wæs fīftiges fōt-gemearces"

f.)[45] and spews fire (2312)[46]. Bēowulf had to brave not only the heat of the fire but also the poison contained in the creature's breath (2839)[47]". Furthermore, that the dragon's body is akin to a serpentine shape is inferable by the fact that "it is referred to as a coiled creature (*hringbogan*, 2561) and when it came out of its burrow "it moved rapidly" (*stonc*, 2288) over the rocks (Keller 1981: 220). We are also informed that the dragon's skin is so hard that Bēowulf's sword is useless against it, at least on its back where its skin is covered with scales (*nacod*, 2273, but also *bāne*, 2578). In fact, the hero will manage to find the dragon's weak spot when he cuts open its belly – a vulnerability that is completely compatible with nature (Carlson 1967: 363) and reminds the anatomy of a lizard (Keller 1981: 220) – after Wīglāf had previously stroke the dragon with his own sword. Finally, the only attribute that differentiates completely the dragon from the class of lizards and serpents is that it has wings, although they are not directly mentioned in the poem. Nevertheless, "the dragon is called a flying monster (*lyftfloga*, 2315) and later referred to as the "far-flying one" (*wīdfloga*, 2830) which was capable of "flying through the air at dead of night" (2832 f.)" (Keller 1981: 220).

Moving away from these physical attributes just discussed and focusing on the dragon as an evil creature, as it is featured in the poem, a comparison with Grendel may be interesting indeed. Generally speaking, both the dragon and Grendel are both enemies to mankind, as some terms employed by the poet clearly indicate: *fēond mancynnes* (l. 164) but especially *lēodsceaða* (l. 2093) in reference to Grendel and *ðēodsceaða* (l. 2278) used of the dragon. So, what are the differences between the two? And, more importantly, why the poet would have Bēowulf fight against two monsters equal in nature? Since Bonjour (1953: 308) points out that considering men as own enemies is characteristic of all monsters for, "whether they be *thyrs* or dragon, (they) *are* maleficent (even relatively harmless nicors are not in order of sanctity with our poet), and they are maleficent to mankind rather than to individuals, characters, parties or tribes", then the dragon is indeed evil – and so is Grendel too – as we have already stated. We must therefore investigate further in order to find out a distinction between the two and here it is where Gang comes to our aid since he affirms that dragons can be evil but in "an impersonal, amoral sense: rather as we might think of a disease as an evil" (1952: 6). In so doing, he is agreeing with

[45] "[...] ac mid bǣle fōr, / fȳre gefȳsed."
[46] "Đā se gæst ongan glēdum spīwan"
[47] "attor-sceaðan oreðe"

one aspect of Tolkien's interpretation of *Bēowulf* that the dragon is "a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life), and of the indiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good from bad (the evil aspect of all life)", while Grendel, being as he is kin to Cain, is evil in a moral sense. The dragon then, transcending this moral level of evil, exceeds Grendel in evilness becoming a "foe more evil than any human enemy of house and realm" (Tolkien 1936: 259). Finally, Grendel in the poem is referred to as *Godes andsaca* (l. 786) or *dreamum bedǣled* (l. 721), epithets that are never applied to the dragon and that lend Grendel a more "human like monster hue" than the dragon itself, for "Grendel inhabits the visible world and eats the flesh and blood of men; he enters houses by doors. The dragon wields a physical fire and covets gold not souls" (Tolkien 1936: 265-6).

V. Development of a hero

The figure of the hero is probably one of the most popular in every mythology and ancient literature of the world. In fact, the hero is usually a human being with unequalled physical, moral and psychological virtues, like beauty, courage, magnanimity, eloquence and being willing to sacrifice himself for the benefit of his own people. Sometimes, the hero is son to a divinity and a mortal or, after his death, he is consecrated as a deity himself.

This title of "hero" is then also attributed to those who have performed some valiant deeds in battle or, metaphorically, even to those who have been influential in social life. Moreover, a second meaning of "hero" is the one of "main character" in a literary work, a meaning which fits well enough for Gawain, considering that he is the protagonist of a large number of literary texts throughout the centuries, even if it should be borne in mind that he also shares much of the virtues usually attributed to the classical hero. On the other hand, Bēowulf can be considered a hero without any doubt even if he belongs to a different literary tradition, independent from the classical and Christian cultures, namely the Germanic and Scandinavian one, which is usually organised in heroic sagas following the life and remarkable deeds of a particular hero – like Sigurd, for instance, the central character of the 13th century Icelandic prose called *Völsunga saga*.

Every epic form has as its foreground not only the figure of the hero, as it has just been explained, but the hero himself embodying the trials he has to face in order to defend his own people. This one is a peculiarity concerning every kind of hero, both the demigod and the extraordinary human hero, since such trials involve him as an individual. According to how the trials are presented to the hero is also possible to classify different types of epic:

> The first kind of epic has scarcely emerged from the collections of myths and legends from which it is derived, and it represents the universal trials of the race or tribe. Such are the Hebraic writings from the Mosaic books to the later prophets, and such are the Northern *Eddas* which give a complete description of human experience from the creation to the apocalyptic destruction and renewal of all things. The second kind of epic includes the trials of the hero as the incarnation of his race or tribe, and is, therefore, tribal or national in its emphasis. The *Mahabharata*, the *Aeneid*, and the *Volsungasaga* or *Nibelungenlied* are perhaps most representative of this type. In the third category are to be found the individualistic epics in which the emphasis is placed on the trials of the hero with the hero as the central and dominating figure – the *Ramayama*, the *Iliad* and the *Bēowulf*. In all of these,

> there is a basic struggle between the divine, the natural, and the demonic within the field of the hero's experience. (Fisher 1958: 172)

According to such a classification, we should place *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* among the third kind, since the poem has Gawain as its dominant figure and the trial he has to accomplish concerns him alone though, in a way, he represents somehow an incarnation of Camelot itself in his accepting and fulfilling the challenge of the Green Knight, in order to live up and preserve the honour of his King and the court to which he belongs.

Both Gawain and Bēowulf put at risk their lives in those battles they are called to engage against several supernatural adversaries, battles that constitute the matter of their respective poems. Ingenuously, we may be inclined to consider such fights as representative of the usual struggle between good and evil, a dichotomy which thus lacks in highlighting such ambiguous shades of meaning in the interpretation of the hero – with all his remarkable virtues – who has to accept the challenge of or to seek battle with his adversaries, who are, on the contrary, always characterised by evil attributes. During these fights – in particular, between Gawain and the Green Knight, the part concerning the return blow and, as for Bēowulf, his mortal fight against the dragon – there is a moment which is worth to be pointed out, a moment in which the usual strictly demarcated borderline between the hero and his antagonists begins to blur. Then, after such short moments, the proper roles of hero and enemy are restored, along with their identities, in order to lead to the outcome of their respective battles and, consequently, to the ending of the poems themselves.

1. The hero and his trials: Bēowulf's three fights

If it has been spent enough words in Chapter III on the challenge between Gawain and the Green Knight, the fights between Bēowulf and his adversaries have not been analysed in-depth since, in Chapter IV, I have focused the attention only on the epithets and periphrases used of the latter throughout the poem. Such investigation is undoubtedly useful to give shape to the idea of how these creatures are characterised in the poem and even how Bēowulf considers them by looking at the epithets he actually uses of them.

As for these fights engaged by Bēowulf, they develop several archetypal motives which pertain to what could be considered the typical pattern of such heroic struggles. Fairly important is also the actual ritual the hero follows while fighting his adversaries and the weapons he uses, which differ largely from one battle to another and thus display a kind of *climax* in their progression (Ruggerini 1995: 202-15). A common trait to all these three episodes is the presence of some elements of chaos and diversity that threaten first Hrōðgar's hall and then King Bēowulf's social community. Moving more specifically to the single battles, Bēowulf who confronts himself with Grendel's mother diving into the mere in order to reach her abode, like the Greek heroes in their clashes against monsters with a serpentine shape, performs something like a rite of initiation in winning over his interior fears as well as over such monstrous creature who is guarding the threshold of an infernal-like place – in fact, Grendel and his mother are referred to as *hūses hyrdas* (l. 1666), Grendel's mother is then said to be *grund-hyrde* (l. 2136) while of the dragon is used *beorges hyrde* (l. 2304) and *beorges weard* (l. 2524), among other epithets involving the meaning of being at guard of a treasure. So these three enemies, despite their different appearances and abodes, have something in common, namely the fact that they are performing the same role of a guardian. The third episode of the dragon, in particular, is strictly connected with the heroic *topos* of the descent into Hell, since the dragon dwells in a proper mound. Such mound, situated on the top of the promontory, still presents an opening to the world of the living, a feature that will acquire importance when both the antagonists – the hero and the dragon – will be said they are going to die. If the defeat of the dragon is a definitive one, Bēowulf, having faced with dignity the passage from life to death, can aspire to revive as a legendary figure in the posterity's mind. Under a Christian perspective too, Bēowulf's sacrifice for the sake of his own people makes the hero worthy of achieving the promise of an eternal life.

The peculiar difference which characterises the third encounter of the hero with the last of his enemies is that Bēowulf is no longer alone in fighting his adversary. During the first two clashes against Grendel and then his mother, the Geat hero is alone by necessity the first time, and by choice the second, even if a handful of expert warriors, chosen by Hrōðgar himself, help Bēowulf to find the mere where Grendel's mother abode his located but then, in the very moment of need, they abandon the hero to his own destiny having thought that he was already dead. On the other hand, in the last section of the

poem, the young Wīglaf performs a fundamental role in the fight against the dragon, since he helps actively his king in killing the monster. This is the first time that, in Germanic literature, the solitary figure of the hero is replaced with the *topos* of the couple of warriors, usually featured in the classical tradition as a couple of brothers (or even twins) – in this case, the joined deed is characterised by their rivalry – or as a couple of friends, namely the hero and his companion who is also his subordinate, being less experienced than him. A third kind is constituted by a couple featuring a hero/divinity together with his companion/servant (Ruggerini 1995: 205). Finally, this fellowship between Bēowulf and Wīglaf could be seen, being the king without any heir, as a way to pass down the power to this young warrior, who has proved himself to be worthy enough.

As far as the weapons used by Bēowulf are concerned, he decides to fight Grendel with only his bare hands in order to prove best his strength, after having affirmed, in several places in the poem, that he is completely confident of his prowess and that he wants to perform a full contact fight against his enemies, for being both fair to his disarmed adversary and conscious that this is the ritual that requires to be followed. In fact, preceding Grendel's arrival at Heorot, Bēowulf begins to rid himself off of his armours and weapons in a clear overturn of the usual ritual of preparation that precedes a duel. During the second fight against Grendel's mother, the hero dives into the mere with his armour and the sword Hruntig, that Unferþ has lent to him. This sword will prove itself useless against such a monster, so Bēowulf is again forced to a full contact struggle that, this time, is by no means favourable to him. Then, he manages to kill the ogress thanks to a sword found in the cavern that shows undoubtedly some magical traits. It is particularly interesting to note that, when Bēowulf narrates this fight to his king Hygelac, he finds deserving to be remembered only the moment when he fought Grendel's mother with his bare hand. Ruggerini (1995: 214-15) notes that engaging battle with a female adversary means that hero's strength and his traditional weapons are not adequate at all to defeat such a monster, since the matter is not only overwhelming the adversary thanks to Bēowulf's physical strength – besides, being stronger is not a man's taken for granted prerogative in this case – but, above all, succeeding in neutralise such dangerous dark magical arts that are usually linked with an archaic female figure ascribable in the text to Grendel's mother herself. Finally, the hero is willing to have battle without any weapon against the dragon too but, at the same time, he is aware that both the fire and the poison

of the dragon could be extremely dangerous, so it is necessary to equip himself with an appropriate armour and an iron shield, forged for such occasion.

2. Blurring the boundaries: churlish Gawain and Bēowulf as āglǣca

Twelve months after the first encounter between Gawain and the Green Knight, they met again at the Green Chapel, as it was previously set, for the hero has to suffer the arranged return blow. This is the exact moment when the hero temporarily loses both his famous courtesy and his knightly identity, as it has already touched on in Chapter III. It is possible to follow Gawain's progression from his arrival at the chapel down to the almost apparent overturn in the two adversaries' roles and then to the following restoration of the order.

As soon as Gawain appears at the Green Chapel, he begins to call out for his challenger and he also announces himself with the following words, "For now is gode Gawain goande ryȝte here"[48] (l. 2214), so we may note that he feels at ease in attributing to himself such a flattering epithets, 'gode', for he has kept the initial agreement. Gawain's identity of a courtly and honourable knight begins to deteriorate when the Green Knight implies that his adversary could not be Gawain himself – "Þou art not Gawayn," quoþ þe gome, "þat is so goud halden, / Þat neuer arȝed for no here by helle no be vale"[49] (ll. 2270-1) – for he has shown a slight sign of fear and even cowardice, at least this is what the Green Knight insinuates, in his attempt to avoid his adversary's stroke. The acme is later reached when the Green Knight, after having delivered a feint swing – which we know is strictly linked to the temptations – provokes Gawain with merry words – "So, now þou hatȝ þi herte holle, hitte me bihous. / Halde þe now þe hyȝe hode þat Arþur þe raȝt"[50] (ll. 2266-7) – which bring Gawain to a churlish anger. Then, the knight's speech becomes as uncourtly as the challenger's:

"Wy! Þresch on, þou þro mon, þou þreteȝ to longe;

[48] "For now 'tis good Gawain on ground that here walks" (Tolkien 1975: 83)
[49] "Thou'rt not Gawain,' said the green man, 'who is so good reported, / who never flinched from any foes on fell or in dale" (Tolkien 1975: 84)
[50] "So, now thou hast thy heart whole, a hit I must make. / May the high order now keep thee that Arthur gave thee" (Tolkien, 1975: 85)

I hope þat þi hert arȝe wyth þyn awen seluen."[51]

(ll. 2300-01)

The tone is the churlish one that so often has characterised the Green Knight's delivered speeches, very rich in interjections ("*Wy!*"), epithets ("*þou þro mon*"), insults ("*þro*") since the entire speech is obviously denoted by Gawain's anger. The boundaries between these two adversaries are now blurred. Then, the Green Knight is ready to return the blow and when it barely nicks Gawain's neck, the knight is likely as if he has undergone a kind of rebirth. In fact, he stands up immediately, snatches up his helm, just as the Green Knight snatched up his head at Camelot, and:

Schot with his schuldereȝ his fayre schelde vnder,
Braydeȝ out a bryȝt sworde, and bremely he spekeȝ –
Neuer syn þat he watȝ burne norne of his moder
Watȝ he neuer in þis worlde wiȝe half so blyþe –
"Blynne, burne, of þy bur, bede me no mo!
I haf a stroke in þis sted withoute stryf hent,
An if þou recheȝ me any mo, I redyly schal quyte,
And ȝelde ȝederly aȝayn – and þerto ȝe tryst –
and foo.
Bot on stroke here me falleȝ –
Þe couenaunt schop ryȝt so,
Fermed in Arþureȝ halleȝ –
And þerfore, hende, now hoo![52]

(ll. 2318-30)

From this speech we can easily detect that Gawain, unbelievably delighted that he has survived and pleased that he has kept the agreement, now becomes the antithesis of the ceremonial and courteous fashion he exhibited at the beginning of the poem.

He leaps about like the Green Knight and he adopts that character's manner of speech, with its boasts ("I redyly schal quyte"), its shouts ("now hoo"), its ironic epithets ("hende"), and

[51] "Why! lash away, thou lusty man! Too long dost thou threaten. / 'Tis thy heart methinks in thee that now quaileth!" (Tolkien 1975: 85)
[52] "Under his fair shield he shot with a shake of his shoulders, / brandished his bright sword, and boldly he spake – / never since he as manchild of his mother was born / was he ever on this earth half so happy a man: / 'Have done, sir, with thy dints! Now deal me no more! / I have stood from thee a stroke without strife on this spot, / and if thou offerest me others, I shall answer thee promptly, / and give as good again, and as grim, be assured, / shall pay. / But one stroke here's my due, / as the covenant clear did say / that in Arthur's halls we drew. / And so, good sir, now stay!" (Tolkien 1975: 86)

> its "breme" manner. Gawain has become churlish, a point that the Green Knight makes clear in his use of "vnmanerly" in his very next speech. He can now use that word without irony, because at the same time Gawain becomes churlish in his manner the Green Knight becomes almost a gentleman. (Benson 1965: 236)

The Green Knight decides that the time has come to finally reveal the entire adventure to Gawain, explaining the meaning of his three strokes in comparison with the threefold temptation of Lady Bertilak, along with some praises for what the knight has accomplished so far. Yet Gawain is incapable of feeling anything but shame for what he has done in not returning the green girdle to his host, on the morning of the third day at Bertilak's castle. Gawain is now able to realise the truth of the Green Knight's statement – "Þou are not Gawayn" – and also acknowledges that he has forsaken his "kynde". However, such temporary exchange in manners does not last long since, at the end of the poem, both Gawain and the Green Knight retain their integrity, even if the hero is returned the green girdle that will remember Gawain the moment when he lacks in "trawþe".

The main issue in regard to Bēowulf is strictly linked with the occurrence of the word *āglǣca* in line 2592, when it is used both of the hero and the dragon. A brief analysis of such term has been already given in Chapter IV in reference to its use of Grendel (l. 159), but it occurs some nineteen times throughout the poem, mostly in reference to various monstrous creatures – eleven times is used of Grendel (ll. 159, 425, 433, 592, 646, 732, 739, 816, 989, 1000, 1269), five of the dragon (ll. 2520, 2534, 2557, 2592, 2905) and twice of the sea-beasts (ll. 556, 1512) – though it is also used twice applied to the hero Sigemund (l. 893) and indeed to Bēowulf himself. The term also occurs, outside *Bēowulf*, in some other Old English texts such as *Juliana* (ll. 268, 319, 430), *Elene* (l. 901), *Guthlac A* (l. 575), *The Phoenix* (l. 442), *Christ and Satan* (ll. 73, 160, 446, 578, 712) and *The Whale* (l. 52) where it is usually used in reference to devils, Satan and the Fallen Angels. Apart from these poems, *āglǣca* seems to be applied to human referents in *Andreas* too, in particular in line 1131 in reference to the Mermodonians and in line 1359 to Saint Andrew. Harking back to the occurrences in *Bēowulf*, or at least to the monstrous ones, some characteristics shared by such referents could be pointed out (Gillam 1961: 149-56). First of all, all the creatures of whom the term is used possess some bestial features or they are proper beasts, like the sea-beasts and the dragon that are also described as *nicor* ('hippopotamus'), *hronfisc* ('whale'), *draca* and *wyrm*,

respectively. Moreover, such beasts are also characterised by great strength and size; Grendel too is undoubtedly strong and much bigger than the average human being, since four men are said to be needed to carry Grendel's severed head inside the hall at Heorot – *Fēower scoldon / on þām wæl-stenge weorcum geferian / tō þām gold-sele Grendles hēafod*[53] (l. 1637b-39). The Beowulfian *āglǣcan* predilection for human flesh is another peculiar characteristic of them.

Then, a second implication is the possession of unnatural or sinister qualities, in fact

> they may have the strange, inhuman characteristics of an *eoten* [*Bēowulf* 425 (421); 732/739 (761)] or a *þyrs* [*Bēowulf* 425 (426)]; they may be credited with the black-magical powers of a spirit of hell [*Bēowulf* 159 (163)]. They may be lonely [*Bēowulf* 159 (165 *angengea*); 433 (449 *angenga*)] and alien [*Bēowulf* 816 (807 *ellorgast*); 1512 (1500 *ælwihta*)] creatures, dwelling in dismal places far away from the society of men and the joys of hall. (Gillam 1961: 151)

Furthermore, we should mention that such creatures are indifferent to weapons and, as a matter of fact, apart from Grendel's mother, they do not uses ordinary weapons (for instance, Grendel always fights unarmed). Then, *æglæcan* do not live in hall under the protection of a lord, are obviously hostile to man and consequently are objects of human hatred. Such antagonism between man and monster finds expression in the several occurrences of the adjective *lað* or of some compounds formed with it, along with other compounds on *-scaða*, for instance, indicating the action of harming.

Another implication is connected to the notions of sin and injury "attested by the fact that several of the compounds used in variation from *æglæca* indicate the harmful characteristics of the creature in their second element and its evil characteristics in their first element" (Gillam 1961: 154). Such an implication is connected, in particular, to the figure of Grendel since he seems to be capable of thinking consciously and therefore he chooses deliberately to sin. Finally, there is also an implication connected with moral guilt, namely the notion of damnation, for if Grendel is sinful on purpose, then he is morally guilty and therefore damned. This notion of damnation in reference to Grendel is implied in several contexts throughout the poem:

> *Bēowulf* 159 (163 *helrunan*); 732/739 (788 *helle hæfton*); 1269 (1273-1274 *ðy he þone feond ofercwon / gehnægde helle gast*); […] *Bēowulf* 816 (805-808, where Grendel is said to journey into the power of fiends9; 989 (972-979, where Grendel's death and judgement are mentioned). (Gillam 1961: 155)

[53] "It was a task for four / to hoist Grendel's head on a spear / ans bear it under strain to the bright hall." (Heaney 1999: 53)

When, in the later Christian context, the term *æglæca* is used to denote a "devil" there is no trace of such bestial characteristics that are extremely peculiar in the *Bēowulf* poem, as it has been stated so far.

As for Bēowulf himself, he shares some of the supernatural qualities of an *æglæca* while he obviously lacks all these specific monstrous characteristics shared by Grendel, the sea-beasts and the dragon, since he is never evil but he is hostile and such hostility is always directed against evil. Specifically speaking, the hero has superhuman strength particularly in his handgrip (1269 ff.; 2501 ff.) plus he has more than human ability to perform feats in, or under, water (530 ff. in reference to his contest with Breca; 1492 ff. in his fight against Grendel's mother; 2355 ff.). Then, in the dragon fight Bēowulf shares several characteristics with his adversary:

> The dragon cannot wield ordinary weapons, and Bēowulf himself, although he does eventually use conventional arms against his adversary, declares that he would prefer to fight without them, as he once fought against Grendel (2518 et seq.). The dragon is a solitary, sinister creature; Bēowulf is alone and deserted by all his followers except Wiglaf. In facing the dragon Bēowulf revisits once more a terrible place where monsters live. Throughout the fight he is superhumanly strong and brave and successful. Such prowess is uncanny, if not sinister. (Gillam 1961: 168)

In so doing, it is fairly impossible to not set Bēowulf apart from other men, since he possesses such admirable superhuman qualities that are peculiar to the hero but that are not meant to make of him a man *inter pares*. So, this is why he almost identifying himself with the monster, the *æglæca* he is going to fight (ll. 2532-25).

In conclusion, we obviously have to figure out that such ambiguous application of the term in line 2592 has to be understood both figuratively, of Bēowulf, and literally, of the dragon, in order to recognise in it the exemplification of the exceptional nature of the dragon fight, the last that Bēowulf is called to engage.

VI. Afterword

From both the pragmatic and the linguistic analyses conducted so far, the peculiar characteristic that emerges is maybe the one involving how the heroes are portrayed in their respective poems, in regard to the fact that both the anonymous poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the *Bēowulf*'s one had succeeded in representing those very moments in which the hero is related to his adversaries, due to his own fault – the temporary dearth of good manner and eloquence in Gawain – or to his superhuman qualities – Bēowulf's extraordinary strength. Such a representation could be perceived as rather modern since it sets itself free form the boundaries of the traditional *topos* regarding the portrayal of the hero and indulges in representing his faults too.

In order to come to a similar conclusion, it has been useful to provide a first pragmatic analysis (chapter III) of the *flyting* scene involving both Sir Gawain and his adversary, the Green Knight. Hence, it has been possible to outline the pattern followed by the poet in devising the development of the contest between the twos, from the first proposition of it by the side of the Green Knight, after his arrival at Camelot during a feast for the celebration for Christmas and the New Year, to the occasion of the return blow at the Green Chapel twelve months later.

A second analysis (chapter IV) pertains the investigation of the several epithets and periphrases used in regard to the three monstrous creatures featured in *Bēowulf*, namely Grendel, his mother and the dragon. After having listed and accordingly studied each entry for every figure, some semantic categories have been selected in order to draw a more specific profile of these creatures, highlighting both their peculiarities and their ambiguities. Furthermore, other tables are provided, which show the collected epithets and periphrases divided on the basis of their place in the text (authorial narration; Bēowulf's speeches and other characters' ones). Such linguistic analysis has been useful to note that these three creatures are all referred to by means of negative terms, at least for the major part – some of them, for instance, are usually used of demonic referents in other Old English poems – while a large number of them refer to their being enemies both to Bēowulf and to Hrōþgār's and Bēowulf's people as well. Some specific characteristics of the three of them are stressed to, such as Grendel's being an exile, his mother's being

a female as well as a guardian and, finally, the dragon referred to with epithets signifying its serpentine form, its being able to fly and its role as guardian to the hoard.

On the overall, the two poems displayed two heroes, who both do not hesitate in engaging battle with their enemies if their honour and the safety of their people are concerned, even if these enemies are representative of that supernatural that carries with itself several trials, sometimes allegorical, the hero has to face.

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